

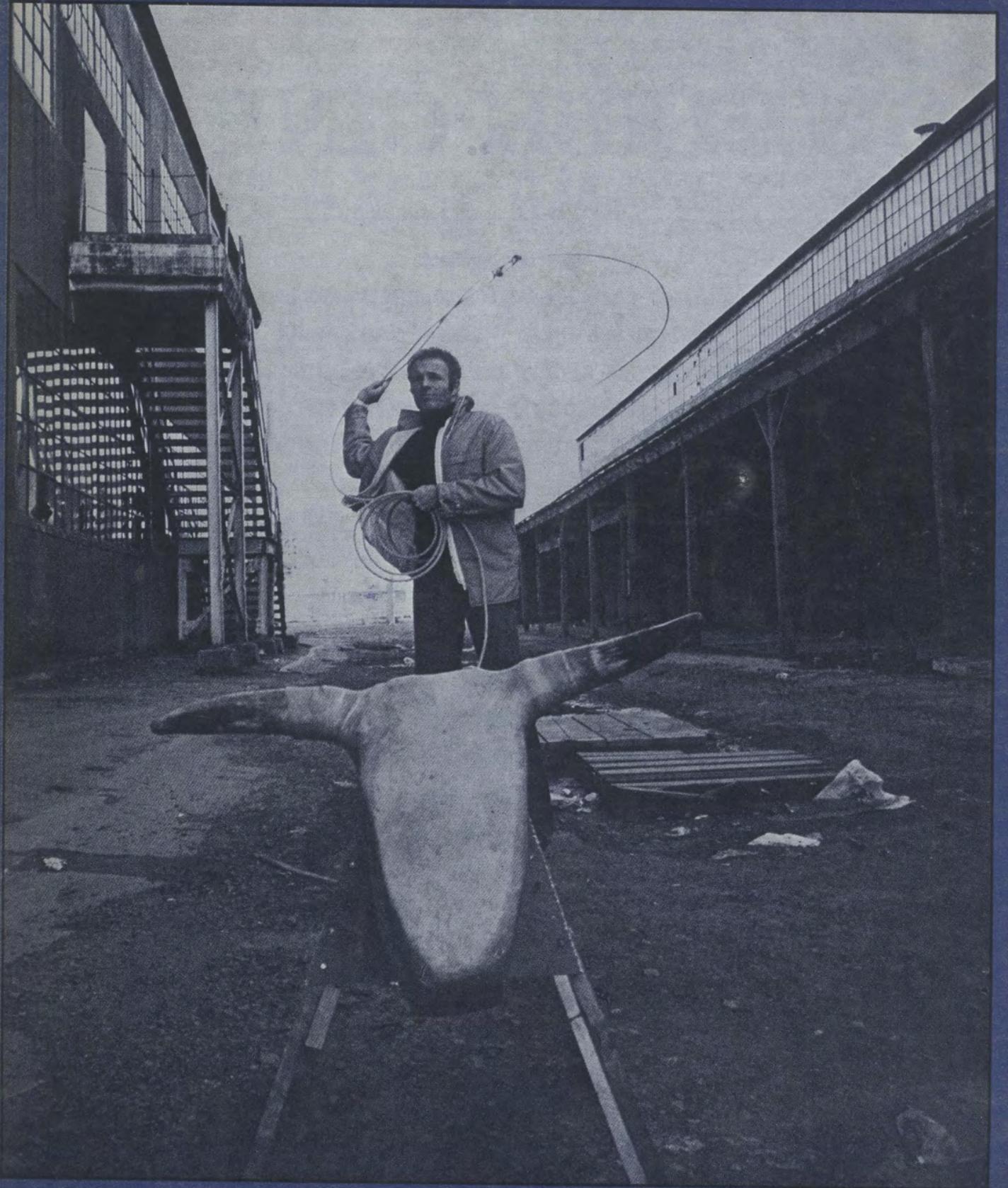


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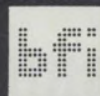
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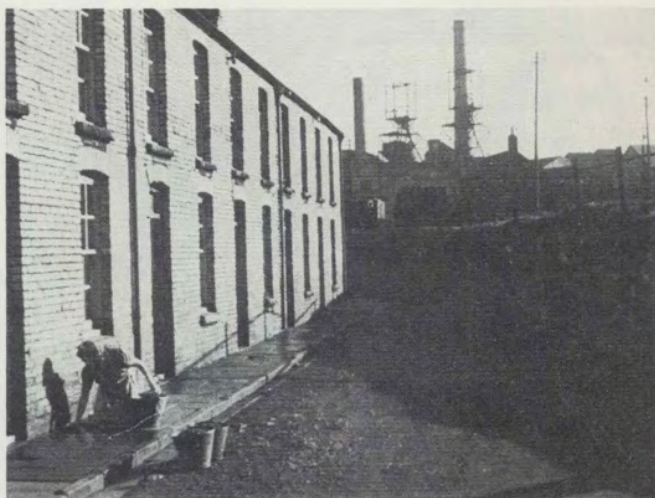
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SIGHT AND SOUND

WINTER 1975/76

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DECISIONS.



The Steel film: Sir Monty Finniston at a board meeting

A discussion between Roger Graef, Dai Vaughan, Terence Twigg, Iain Bruce and Ian Woolf about approaches to TV documentary

DECISIONS

'They're talking about keeping things confidential. Tea ladies are wandering in and out, and they don't stop talking. In a sense the camera has become like a tea lady, just a function which you ignore.'

Early this year the ITV network is showing a series of three long documentaries about decision-making in a series tentatively called *Decisions That Matter*. Each film traces a major investment of financial commitment in the fields of steel, oil and local government rates. They were filmed during 1975 in the British Steel Corporation, Occidental Petroleum and the London Borough of Hammersmith. The film team was granted access to shoot exactly what happened at each stage of the decision-making process, in one case up to and including Board of Directors level. The films were shot without lights, interviews or staging of any kind—*cinéma-vérité*, or observational cinema as the film-makers prefer to call it.

In the last five years, using this technique and observing strict rules about confidentiality, producer/director Roger Graef and his team—cameraman Charles Stewart, sound recordists Iain Bruce and Mike McDuffie, and editors Terence Twigg and Dai Vaughan—have been given unprecedented access to film behind the hitherto closed doors of major political, diplomatic and commercial institutions. For Granada Television, who are producing *Decisions*,

they have made *A Law in the Making: Four Months Inside the Ministry* (ITV network, 1973), which followed the drafting of the Fair Trading Bill in the Department of Trade and Industry and is the only film ever permitted of Ministers and the Civil Service in action; and *Inside the Brussels HQ* (ITV, 1975), the only film of its kind in the 17-year history of the Common Market. For the BBC, they made *Space Between Words* (1972), five films (*Family, School, Work, Politics* and *Diplomacy*) about communications. The series broke new ground in terms of access to private situations and the presentation of personal, industrial and diplomatic relations on television. (See *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1972, p. 190.) Their newest home is at Granada, where their methods coincided with a deepening in the company's approach to current affairs.

The particular form of observational cinema which Graef adopted in the *Space Between Words* series and in later films is more rigorous than what is generally considered as *cinéma-vérité* by critics and other film-makers. Such recent BBC documentaries as *All in a Day*, *Inside Story* and *The Family* included interviews, music, staged sequences or extensive use of voice-over and commentary. Graef's team has so far avoided such devices, save for a minimum of commentary to introduce the situation and the participants. The recent films have dealt with such complex situations that they have acquired a presenter to place them in context, but the films themselves remain intact between the presenter's interventions. The main concern is to capture and condense a sequence of events as closely as possible to its original form. This means editing in an attempt to maintain chronological sequence, a requirement often eschewed by film-makers like Frederick Wiseman, working in the same genre. Since the edited version is shown to the participants for approval of its accuracy, the task of compressing the material is formidable.

Graef and his team arrived at their form of observational film-making after some years of making more conventional documentaries. These earlier films nevertheless contained many sequences of unstaged action and synch dialogue, which made commentary appear increasingly disruptive.

The following is an edited version of a conversation between Terence Twigg, Dai Vaughan, Iain Bruce, Roger Graef (Charles Stewart was busy filming) and BBC producer Ian Woolf, whose series on documentaries, transmitted in November 1975 on BBC-1, included a programme on the work of this team. It is introduced here by Roger Graef.

'Tony Garnett once asked me why I published so much about how and why we made our films. Weren't we just too busy getting on with making them? What was the point? The films should speak for themselves. I hope they do speak for themselves—indeed, that is why we have stripped commentary to a minimum over the years. But the case for debating in public the reasons why we work as we do rests on what we generally feel is a need for both the audience and other film-makers to share their concerns about issues of pro-

fessional, intellectual and political principle in documentary film-making, particularly for television. In many other countries this debate is normal and permanent. But in Britain, as a public matter, it is virtually non-existent. Apart from brief flurries of concern about such confusions of category as Garnett and Loach's documentary-style *Cathy Come Home* or the sharp editing practices of *Yesterday's Men*, the BBC never discusses its principles in public; nor does any other institution or group of film-makers.

'In the case of the *Decisions* series, we asked for and were granted access to the private deliberations of an oil company, a public corporation and a local authority. Although we devised certain rules which offered them security during the filming about confidentiality and accuracy, they have taken a leap of faith in allowing us to film them while they made up their minds about difficult choices. It seems only fair that we should share some of our decision-making processes as well.'

Ratio

The total amount of footage shot in relation to what appears on the screen is generally higher in cinéma-vérité films than in conventional documentaries. Frederick Wiseman regularly shoots up to seventy feet for every one used; Leacock and Pennebaker frequently shoot forty or fifty to one. The Graef team's procedure of sticking firmly to one chosen issue limits the shooting ratio to a maximum of thirty-three to one and often less. Because of avoiding the high cost of electricians and lights, this filming is no more expensive than conventional documentaries. But the amount of film consumed is misleading.

ROGER GRAEF: Our ratio is actually low. If we take ten or twenty meetings out of the sixty or so the editor has but won't be using, the coverage of each meeting to be used is actually fairly skimpy. The selection process involved is one of time and content. We say we will only show this part of the process. The material from the other meetings doesn't help the editor at all. So the ratio that needs to be understood when compared to other films is the ratio of the coverage of each meeting. Whereas an ordinary film-maker might actually do more shooting of it than we would, because he'd do endless miles of cutaways, people walking in and out of the room, and tables and pads and so on, which we don't have. We film the entire discussion on our subject, but we only have the speaker and a few reaction shots. So our ratio may be sometimes lower than a conventional film-maker's.

TERENCE TWIGG: It's not like fiction film editing, in the sense that you don't have a lot of coverage of one action. The point is that you've got this enormous mass of material to pick a few scenes from. And each scene you do select may have a minimum of internal cuts—although you can spend a lot of minor ingenuity trying to conceal the unavoidable gaps.

IAN WOOLF: What we're really talking about are the stages you go through in boiling this down.

TT: My point is that this is the only kind of



'Decisions': Oil. Bob McAllister, Director of Occidental (U.K.), a consortium which is spending \$500 per minute in the North Sea

film-making in which as you reduce the film it seems to get more boring. In fact, some people are fascinated by the six-hour cut versions and the seventeen hours of rushes. But their interest diminishes as you reduce the film. The tendency on other films is usually that they get sharper. You get a lot of material and you cut out the loose bits. Whereas with our films the reaction is that the more you reduce them the worse they get.

DAI VAUGHAN: They are not just getting worse, they are changing into something else.

TT: The reason these rushes are interesting is because they actually do present you with the whole thing. If you treated, say, the *Steel* film in a conventional way, you simply would have no time to film the whole process. So you'd go to certain people in their offices and do interviews with them about what happens. In our film the interest is actually in the event itself. You satisfy your curiosity about what it is like to be in on these top officials making up their minds about important things. It's a privilege—very few people have actually been inside seeing what goes on. Therefore it's interesting to be there the whole time, seeing entire meetings, the ebb and flow of arguments, the decisions taken or not taken. You shoot thirty hours of which two-thirds or less is relevant. You can sit there and watch the whole thirty hours and find it interesting. But how do you boil that down into one or two hours without indeed turning it into something else?

DECISIONS,



'Decisions': Oil. Jerry Williams, head of North Sea exploration, with his deputy, Keith Petersen

Story and Dialectic

IW: If you've got a whole series of meetings, you have to start off on the principle that within any one interaction you are going to try to keep as much as you can of that particular meeting. So right from the outset you're actually deciding which are the meetings that matter and which you can discard.

TT: From the beginning you have to discover for yourself what the story is. And the people themselves are not always certain what the story is. In a sense this is where

some of these rules fall apart, because you are proceeding in fact to structure your material.

RG: No, that's not true. There is a dialectic between the needs of the film-maker—which extend to the needs of the television company and the audience—and the experience itself. That is a permanent tension. In our attempt to make 'films of record', we do miss key moments because we weren't in on them, or because we ran out of film or tape. That dialectic is permanently there, and is carried on back in the cutting room with all the rushes and the need to boil them down into an hour-long film.

All we are saying is that actually we pay attention to these differences. Whereas the standard procedure for many film-makers seems to be, 'Forget it'. The BBC Green Book on documentaries suggests that you go along, spend a day or two watching what happens, and then you are suddenly an expert on what's typical. And then you *stage* what's typical. It implies that we know more about what's typical than the participants do. And what we're saying is that we know all along that we don't. But we're going to try to pay some sort of respect all the way through the process to what is actually happening and what *it* tells us. The only thing one does by making up these rules in the first place and telling the participants what the rules are is to try to create some sort of objective criteria for the final compression into a film. In other words, the rules don't all break down in the editing. They are always under tension, right from the beginning.

TT: But surely one of the distinctions between these films and other films is that you don't know how the story is going to go. A lot of people who make documentaries know the story because it has already happened and they have written a script. But in this case you don't even know if there is going to be a story.

RG: No, we *do* know there is going to be a story.

IW: If British Steel end up deciding that they can't make a decision...

RG: Yes, but our chosen decision is our guide as to what to shoot, and then what to cut. When we go to British Steel, at least they know we are making a film about what will happen to Hunterston.* We have said that this is what we are doing, and anything else is just not on.

TT: Yes, in that sense you know there is a story. But you have no way of knowing how the story is going to develop.

RG: Our own uncertainty about where it's going or how it will end is built into the films themselves. It's a mixed blessing, of course. It makes planning ahead almost impossible. But it does lend genuine tension. At each point in the film *no one* knows the outcome—quite unlike scripted or staged documentaries.

* The decision in the *Steel* film concerned a proposed factory at Hunterston in Scotland.

DV: You don't know what the course of events will be, or if it will turn out to have a narrative shape or even be interesting on any level. But with that much judicious coverage you have enough to extract the subject. One guesses and one is usually right.

TT: I don't think it's 'fictionalising', but it is something like 'structuring'.

DV: We are deriving a narrative, but we are not imposing the narrative. The distinction I'm trying to make is that something sinister does happen, but it is not related to fiction. The more you shorten it, the more you implicitly or explicitly explain it. You are not fictionalising it, but you are making it more demonstrative. And I think that is where the danger is.

If the story is filmed as it happened, it is the story, and the fact that you focus on it doesn't make it any more fictitious. But what could happen is that the thing subtly changes into *you* using *them* to demonstrate your thesis. In that case you are using them, not for their 'reality' but as it were for their 'verisimilitude'. And then it only becomes a matter of getting a better performance—the method is reduced to that.

RG: In some ways we are in the documentary tradition closer to the low-key realism of De Sica than to the heroic realism of Grierson. The thing that connects us with De Sica is his use of context as of equal if not greater interest than the story and the actors. His films after the war are really about Rome, as ours are really about the situation in the head office of British Steel or the EEC headquarters in Brussels. Even people who don't follow the details of discussions in our films still come away feeling that they have learned something about the atmosphere in these places—and it lends humanity to the faceless bureaucrats as a result. I can't imagine Grierson making a film about bureaucrats.

TT: The interesting point is that they are felt to be human because you see them doing their jobs, not playing with their kids or some other human interest thing for its own sake.

RG: We've taken risks in *Steel* and *Oil* in leaving out the workers at the plant and on the rigs, who are the dominant figures in most programmes on these subjects—usually beautifully shot and cut, in the best Grierson tradition. But our experience of trying to merge the two in any artificial way—to extend the context or add to the material we've shot in the offices—has always failed. People were always urging us to add shots of pollution in the EEC film about a pollution control resolution, but this would have killed the film stone dead. Despite their structured stories our films are about a process—not about issues, in the *Panorama* sense.

Editing

With sound and picture recorded separately, they can be combined in any way the editor and director choose. In documentaries like

Yesterday's Men, taking quotations out of context, using satirical music and so on raised protests that have put many would-be participants in documentary films on their guard. By using real conversations, and offering the participants the chance to confirm the accuracy of the edited material, the Graef team hopes to establish a special kind of trust in the authenticity of the material. But the films are still edited versions of the original, and in the editing of *cinéma-vérité* a host of discreet decisions are contained.

rw: Talking about the differences between your films and more conventional documentaries, you once said that you try to reduce the number of cutaways to a minimum...

RG: This is a three-way decision. Charles Stewart, of course, manages to sustain the shots remarkably often. What happens next is that we try to preserve as much of the real thing as possible in the editing. Then we hand it over to the executive machine and they say it's got to be 52 minutes, or 90 minutes if we're lucky. So we try to keep the sense of real time intact while compressing the film. And long takes do that.

rw: There's a point at which Charles Stewart is acting as a film editor. He is observing someone talking and decides that enough has been said and wants to see what the reaction is, so he pans over to someone else.

TT: That's not acting as a film editor. He makes a selection, which in certain other types of film-making it would be open to the editor to make.

RG: What I find interesting about Charles' decision-making moments is that because he leaves the other eye open while shooting, he's looking for the reactions that would not normally attract a cameraman's attention. Somebody usually has to talk or gasp or say 'You bastard', and then they'll pan over. Charles is actually looking to see who wants to talk next, who's fidgeting and so on. He'll go to somebody scratching, as with the son in the *Family* film. He will actually go to a close shot of this boy just flicking a matchbox back and forth—which, granted, had a bit of noise to it, but was very much an alienated reaction to a lot of abuse his mother was giving him. Whether another cameraman would have done this is hard to say, but it's certainly not the obvious reaction shot.

TT: Yes. There's a moment in the *Steel* film when two executives are huddling together and saying, 'This must be absolutely confidential. There are people around this building who might find out.' As they're whispering, the tea lady walks in and Charles pans off on to her, and then back... In a sense there is an attempt to cover it all in just one long shot, to provide the cutaways, to cover the reactions.

DV: Charles has a theory that the first sentence of what anybody says is never important. It's only said to capture attention. So when someone starts talking, there is time to get round and be on him by the time he says something worth hearing. Sometimes he's right, and sometimes he's wrong, and then you're in trouble. So it's not foolproof shooting for the editor. It's a situation where he can't possibly know what

you, the editor, might want to do with the material.

TT: In the broader sense, although it isn't practical to shoot everything and some selection must be made, Charles does try to film all the points of the discussions which appear relevant to the theme of the film. So the editor has to select perhaps one or two hours out of thirty or forty hours of material. But in a narrower sense, at any given point in the discussion Charles has decided whether the camera is showing the speaker or a reaction, and in long-shot or close-up. The editor has very little control over that sort of decision. In another style of film-making he might have. But in this case the cameraman is carrying out most of this part of the editing function.

rw: If there's a problem of coverage, why not have two crews?

RG: The people being filmed won't trust that many people. And also the cameraman and the sound recordist must have the whole story in their heads the whole time. Two crews in different places couldn't do that.

rw: Peter Bartlett, interviewed in one of my programmes, says that as a cameraman he's conscious of going into a place with the gear and almost instantaneously destroying the relationship which he suspects the director has built up.

IAIN BRUCE: That's partly dependent on how much camera gear he takes in. It's a question of how you handle that situation, and that's quite an important aspect of keeping the technical 'frontage' of filming down to a minimum.

TT: The Maysles camera in the early days of *cinéma-vérité* stuck out two feet in front of them and two feet behind—a four-foot plank over someone's shoulder, a complete one-man outfit.

RG: We believe in being discreet. When we're shooting in offices, we all wear suits and cut our hair reasonably short, and keep everybody and everything not vital to the shooting out of the room. We try to avoid outnumbering the subjects...

Film Crew and Filmed Subject

One of the features of this way of working is an unobtrusiveness not normally available to conventional film-making. This allows a degree of relaxation by the subjects that shows in the films. The naturalness of such behaviour has led to a debate about whether the films portray 'objective' reality or a 'subjective' selection which includes far more 'acting' than the convention suggests. For the camera team, the task is to keep out of the way as much as possible, to allow events to happen with as little interference as can be managed. No hidden cameras are ever used, however, which means that the film is a record of people carrying on with their work knowing they are being filmed. If the work itself is sufficiently involving, the novelty and distraction of the filming wears off quickly—though no one has ever claimed that its effect wears off entirely.



'Decisions': Oil. Jerry Williams, the oil explorer surveying the world

TT: In that Yorkshire Television documentary about runaway kids in London, *Johnny Come Home*, it struck me that the single most powerful piece of film was the police videotape. The police doctor has just come from mowing his lawn, and he casually picks up the dead boy's arm as he stands astride the body. He is absolutely not bothered by the camera, and I think that's

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because it's not an outside camera crew but just a police cameraman doing his job. This is something you can see in our material when the crew has been in the room long enough.

DV: Everybody seems to talk about our style of filming being objective, and that's misleading because what it suggests is that the relationship between the film image and reality is somehow different from what it is in other films. That's not what it's about—it's the relationship between what is happening in front of the camera and what would happen if the camera weren't there that is different.

RG: That is illustrated by the Yorkshire film. If the television film crew had shot the police doctor sequence, he would have behaved differently, and it would also have looked different on film. My favourite example of unobtrusiveness is in *Diplomacy*, when the American ambassador calls the head of UNICEF an 'S.O.B.' and then looks round to see if anyone has heard him—but he ignores the camera and sound men.

rw: Does the access include what the people you are filming regard as off-the-record conversations?

DV: You have to make it clear that the eavesdropping scenes are not actually eavesdropping, of course...

IB: It's very important to differentiate. Provided you recognise that it's a private conversation, it's not like concealing a camera and poaching something from the other side of the room.

DV: Fly on the wall—a very dangerous metaphor.

Choosing a Subject

Another distinguishing feature of these films is their subject matter. Under generic titles—Oil, Steel, Rates—the films deal in considerable detail with the arguments around a single event or with an issue of quite small proportions by most film and television standards.

rw: Are there certain subjects which are better treated in other ways?

RG: I think these new films are going to be an interesting test of the material and the style, because up to now television has tended to concentrate on the more conventional way of presenting complex economic issues. We provide a more human touch, if you like, in these situations, which are usually a matter of studio shows...

For example, Sir Monty Finniston [Chairman of the British Steel Corporation] was on television non-stop last summer, talking of losing £5m a week and sacking thousands of workers, and what do people actually know about the steel industry after all that? Not very much, I should think, except that things aren't looking too good. But at the end of two hours of our film you may begin to understand why the steel industry has a problem. Or look at the *School* film. Watching that one teacher in that one class did more to shake people's ideas about the reality of comprehensive education than a lot of other programmes about violence in schools—and she was a good teacher. We were accused by some teachers of trying to destroy comprehensive

education; but all we were trying to do was to show something of the daily life of a class and their teacher—to introduce some data into the debate. Just that little slice of evidence was upsetting in a way that no amount of experts and studio talk could be. And I'm confident, or at least optimistic, that you can enter problems that have been opaque by conventional television standards and begin to clarify them.

DV: What we're *not* talking about is objectivity in the sense of letting anything happen in front of the camera. It is the superimposition of a great deal of artifice on something which one trusts to be fairly raw. There is a scene in *School* where Dick Suchman is talking to a group of teachers and Charles pans round all the listeners 360° from Dick and comes back to him but doesn't stop—he pans past Dick on to the girl next to him, who then suddenly interrupts. You watch the rushes and think it's incredible. And Charles will tell you that he knew she would speak because she was doing something to indicate it. If it was in a feature film you'd accept it, but you'd accept it because Orson Welles or someone had planned it, and done thirteen takes to ensure the dialogue arrived at that point by the time the camera reached the girl...

When you think of *ciné-vérité*, you think of people like the Maysles and Leacock in the 1960s, who had a sort of philosophical view that so long as you showed the mike in the picture and the camera reflected in mirrors you'd solved the problem. The problem was that you were showing something that was related to an act of filming but not perceived to be related to an act of filming. And the way to solve that was to show the camera: it was demystified. That was OK as far as it went. But in fact what happened was that every film became a film about people being filmed, which ended up being boring. You had to have more and more hysterical subject matter to make it go on being interesting. What we are doing is going closer to the 19th century novel. We're treating it as naturalism. We're saying that by using various inconspicuous techniques you can get close enough to capture what people are actually doing without influencing it all that much. You could never say there's no influence, but it's minimised.

rw: Your films now consist almost entirely of people talking...

RG: Well, let's go back. I used to direct plays, and I was interested in making political points with plays. I thought people wouldn't listen unless you actually entertained them as well as involving them. Then I realised that they were just interested in the entertainment, so I gave that up. While I was working at the Actors' Studio in New York, I became more and more interested in a kind of detailed observation, and slightly less interested in making a point. Just getting people engaged, a certain kind of ambiguity, a certain kind of everyday difficulty instead of high drama.

In the film we made about thalidomide children,* the main purpose for the sponsors was to get the children into normal schools, but for us its greatest value was actually *watching*. This was a big subject, everybody had heard about it, a lot of prejudice, but they hadn't actually seen any of the

kids, and they certainly hadn't seen them at home. Even the doctors hadn't seen them at home. So what we did there is something that has been a straight line for me in what we have done since. To move the clouds away and make people simply observe things that they ought to care about, or have heard about, or are mystified by.

In a sense all our subjects start at a very abstract level, but we bring them down to a particular problem. The North Sea oil film ends up as a few people having to decide how to spend four hundred million dollars. Friends who have seen *Steel* said it made them feel they could run the Steel Corporation. And that is what I've always wanted people to say after any of these films—the feeling that you can *connect*. Then you can begin to be critical.

DV: So much for observational cinema being non-political...

RG: We seem to have found a way of demystifying institutions. We went into these institutional frameworks where there were certain received ideas of how they worked and how they ought to be seen on television—the kind of television where Huw Weldon used to own all the live artists and Kenneth Clark owns all the dead artists and Robin Day owns all the politicians. We were just trying to break up that monopoly and let people think for themselves. Now we are doing this with things that matter even more—money, local government. We are getting more directly political and saying, look, this is your country, your money, and you should really pay attention to it.

Boredom and Involvement

TT: We are in an area where the subjects are particularly cerebral, aren't they? Visually they consist of people in grey suits sitting round tables talking...

RG: When I was working in the theatre, I started to come apart because I became more interested in detail than in the story. But in documentary film significant detail, the accumulation of detail, is what it is all about. We are saying we can enter what are by any conventional definition patently un-filmic situations and just pay enough attention to hold other people's attention and let them discover something about what is going on.

People said about one of our films, Do you mean to say that we are paying all those people to sit round and have the same argument 17 times over for four months? Which is true, and that's quite an important point. And the other end of that is to say, I see, if it is difficult for them to make up their minds about something fairly uncontroversial, then it is clearly that much harder for them to make up their minds about something which is more important.

DV: If it does nothing else, it breaks through the packaging of political films. The mere words 'current affairs' summon up a certain set of assumptions which underlie

* *One of Them is Brett* (1965). The impact of the film, which was shown on television all over the world, was quite precisely to change the views of thousands of doctors and physiotherapists, and many children were subsequently allowed to stay at home with their families instead of being sent to special homes.



'Decisions': Rates. Iain Bruce and Charles Stewart filming a meeting of Hammersmith's Strategic Resources Committee

the way these things are presented on television.

rw: You could split this amorphous thing called documentary into two sections. There is an investigative section and an observational section.

RG: Investigative programmes on television are mostly second-hand, hamstrung versions of investigative journalism in the press. Because of the Television Acts they can't do what you can do in print. To have someone interviewed on television and looking uncomfortable is telling you a certain amount, but it is really a manipulated situation. But when you watch something, as close as possible to being part of that situation without affecting it too much, you are in a privileged position.

rw: They are basically subjects that other people wouldn't touch because they don't have the element of inherent drama. There is no imposition on the subject matter at all, so it is only a reflection of what actually happens in front of the camera.

TT: The films are not Griersonian in this sense, because nobody is thumping a tub. The true father is Flaherty. What he was saying was that if you go and look carefully at a man catching a fish through a hole in the ice, or trying to light a fire on a south sea island, or machining metal on a lathe, these simple everyday actions can be interesting in themselves. I think our films are nearer to this—observation of this kind.

rw: But Flaherty was the arch manipulator. He got people to do things they hadn't done in a hundred years...

dv: That's interesting, because the only thing similar to what we are doing is being done in ethnographic films. 'Observational film' is a term we have borrowed from anthropology, whereas 'vérité' is a term

borrowed from political films.

RG: There is a stage in which the whole thing is an academic exercise of ethnographic interest; and there is a stage in which it is a political film of tremendous importance. The film we made about Cardiff, for instance, which attempts to show people what local government is all about. Local government is spending three thousand million pounds a year and it is going bankrupt, and this is the thing that affects us more than anything else. But because it is so 'boring' it is never on television, unless there is a scandal. It is that sort of willingness to bite the bullet, to show things that are 'boring', that I think is extremely important, extremely political.

dv: Yes, but when you say we have boring material, you mean that we are filming material which most people would dismiss as boring because it isn't sensational. Another use of the word, when we cut out something because it is boring, is that it is irrelevant to what has become the thread of the narrative which we have decided to hang the film on. Because anything which doesn't seem to relate to the thread tends to seem boring.

RG: It's true that we have new rules for what is boring. By making a commitment to film anything that happens that has to do with a particular subject, we have actually ruled out the question of whether it is too boring to bother shooting—we have to do it. 'Boring' means going through the same argument for the fifth time when you have actually taken the point after two times and you have only an hour's air time.

When we made the EEC film, people kept saying, 'Who would have thought a film about rubbish disposal would be interesting?' I don't think it's such a magical trick.

I think it's perfectly obvious that a film about rubbish disposal at an EEC level when Europe is full of pollution ought automatically to be interesting...

If there is one rule of thumb that distinguishes the way we work it is that we make the audience work much harder. We say that this is interesting and worth looking at, and there is only so much help we are going to give you because otherwise it would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise. We are saying you can take it, watch it, these are people, they make jokes. The Irishman in the EEC film is always making jokes. But we take them at their face value; we're not saying this is too boring for you to watch. In Geneva, they said to us after the second day, 'Are you still here? What are you doing?' The News Department had no idea what 'story' we were actually doing there as ours was so low-key. They just said, 'How can you still be here?'

TT: In these new films you see people doing something that you very rarely see them doing in documentary films, and that is just sitting down and thinking out loud. There is a certain excitement in watching what are on the whole some very competent people actually getting to grips with a complicated problem.

RG: When we say that we don't know how the story is going to turn out, what we are doing is sharing with the audience the fact that the people they most trust and whom they assume to have all the answers don't have them in fact. This is how they reach their answers, and sometimes they don't get answers. And the conveying of uncertainty, both political and philosophical, is very important if you are a democrat. We are saying that Sir Monty Finniston doesn't have the answer, even if he is being paid £28,000 a year and wants more. And he is coming up with arguments which you can understand. Now if you can understand them and he is having trouble with them, your relationship shifts. That's a key point—thinking out loud, publicly.

rw: It includes the possibility that there are no answers.

RG: Yes. How many times have you heard on television somebody important like ministers, diplomats, tycoons say 'I don't know' or 'Maybe I'm wrong'? Well, they do it all the time in these films.

TT: What you can see very clearly in the *Steel* film is that the detailed grasp declines as you go up. The people at the bottom are very bright young men just out of university, who seem to have got the whole thing absolutely buttoned up. And as you go up in the hierarchy, people seem to have less and less grasp of the details, but what they do have is a strategic grasp, a broader view. Finniston takes his decision not because he has been provided with a rational view by this clever young man; he has taken it for quite other reasons—because he has got 8,000 Scottish steel workers complaining at the gate, or the Prime Minister...

RG: And you actually get that. You watch the film for two hours and you get that. It would take you years to believe it, and you see it happening.

Edited by Roger Graef and David Wilson



DIRECTOR: KING HU



胡金銓

The 'discovery' of King Hu's work in the West escalated rapidly last year, thanks to showings at the Cannes, Edinburgh and London festivals and the timely revival of *Four Moods* at one of London's Chinese film clubs; and the NFT's imminent retrospective should serve to fill some of the remaining gaps in our knowledge of his career. It's already clear, though, that none of the interest in *The Fate of Lee Khan* during its London run was misplaced: King Hu is an ambitious and innovative director by the standards of any commercial film industry in the world. Working mainly within a genre whose terms his own early films helped to define, he has consistently conjured themes and incidents from Chinese history and drama into structurally fresh and remarkable films. His choice of historical subjects asserts the continuity of a tradition stretching back to the Ming and Yüan Dynasties and beyond; his aesthetic field of reference extends to classic literature and painting, while drawing extensively on the forms and conventions of the Peking Opera as it developed from the late eighteenth century.

The following feature is in two parts: an interview, which sketches the outline of Hu's career to date and clarifies his somewhat tangential position in the current Hong Kong film industry; and critical notes on the four movies shown in Britain last year, which set out to define some of the salient features of his idiosyncratic, remarkable cinema.

King Hu (Hu Chin-Chuan) was born in Peking in 1931. His father, a geology graduate from Kyoto University in Japan who had participated in the 1911 overthrow of the Ch'ing Dynasty, worked as a mining engineer. At school, like many of his generation, Hu reacted against the 'feudal' family structure still prevalent in China; as a left-wing student, he welcomed the communist take-over of the country in 1949. Wishing to achieve some perspective on the political situation, however, he visited Hong Kong and found himself stuck there when the borders were closed. His early difficulties in securing work were amplified by the fact that he spoke Mandarin (the language of Peking, and China's nearest thing to a national language) rather than the local 'dialect' Cantonese. The following interview, conducted shortly after *A Touch of Zen* won the Commission Supérieure Technique's Grand Prix at Cannes last year, was given in excellent English.

KING HU: My beginnings in the film industry were like this. An advertising company needed someone to paint a huge front-of-house poster for a movie theatre and offered me the job. At the time I was also working as part-time tutor for a young kid whose father was a studio manager; he saw my work on the poster and offered me a job as a set decorator at his studio. I had no idea what a set decorator was, but I needed a job and took it.

While working there I was approached by the director Yen Chun [now retired, the husband of actress Li Li-Hua], asking me to act in his film *The Man who got Slapped*, the story of a man who makes his living as a clown; he needed an 18-year-old to play the man's son. I was 22, and had had no acting experience, but I agreed to try. As it turned out, the film and my performance in it were rather well received, and so I gave

up set decorating to become an actor. My second appearance was in a film called *Golden Phoenix*, based on the novel by Shen Tsun-Wen about Chinese country life before the war.

Then when Mr. Yen needed an assistant director, he offered me that job too. He had two assistants; the other was Li Han-Hsiang [now one of the leading directors in Hong Kong, under contract to Shaw Brothers]. We found ourselves working for Yung Hwa Studios, under the management of Li Tsu-Yung, who was very go-ahead but not a very good businessman. The studio eventually went bankrupt—for the last eight months working there, we didn't get paid. I was meanwhile continuing my acting career [in films like Po Wan-Tsang's *Shoeshine Boy* and *The Long Narrow Lane* and Yueh Feng's *The Deformed*] but I needed extra money in order to carry on working at Yung Hwa, and so I started working for local radio stations, producing radio plays and sometimes writing scripts. When the studio was finally sold up, I became a full-time radio producer, and remained one for five or six years, until about 1959.

During that period, Li Han-Hsiang became a contract director for Shaws. He came to me one day and suggested that I sign a contract with Shaws as an actor. I wasn't too interested, but Runme Shaw (Run Run's brother, the second son) proposed a dual contract as actor and scriptwriter, and I agreed to accept that on the understanding that I'd have the chance to direct after writing a number of scripts.

Were you interested in movies before you came to Hong Kong?

No, it was just a way to make a living.

So how did you grow interested in the possibility of directing?

While working as a set decorator or assistant director I was sometimes struck by the thought that the director wasn't doing a very good job, even though I knew nothing about photography or anything. Also, Yen Chun wasn't a well-educated man (he'd started as an actor and worked his

way up) and he relied on Li Han-Hsiang and me for a lot of his work. We had a lot of responsibility; both of us were asked to direct odd scenes for him when he felt tired. At the same time, my experience in the studios was a good technical training.

Your first 'official' directing work at Shaws wasn't on your own films either...

Right. In 1962, Li asked me to help him with his version of the Huang Mei opera *Liang Shan-Po and Chu Ying-Tai* [usually known in the West as *Eternal Love*]. Run Run Shaw had given him only three months to do it, because the rival M.P. & G.I. Studios (later Cathay) were also producing a version. I turned it down, saying that I'd never seen a Huang Mei opera myself and that I feared all the singing and such would be too slow for my taste, but he prevailed on me to look at the script. It turned out that this consisted of nothing but the lyrics of the songs. I asked how I was expected to work from them alone, and he said that I could do what I liked. Eventually, he did the main sentimental part of the story (which anyway has to have just one director), and I did the faster parts: the lovers-to-be journeying to school and meeting there. Li also did the last part, the graveyard, the deaths and all that.

We were shooting on adjacent stages in the studio, and I was building a countryside set full of cherry blossoms (since it was a love story) when my assistant interrupted, saying that I was making a mistake with the cherries because Mr. Li was shooting his scenes against falling maple leaves. Maple leaves fall in the autumn and cherries bloom in the spring, and so I rushed to his stage and asked what the hell he was doing. He said he was using maple leaves because they suggested the story was going to be tragic. I pointed out that one of us was going to have to change it, and so he redecorated his set. I never saw the finished film.

How did you come to direct your own films?

After I'd been there a year or two, Shaw Brothers took over from the old Shaw & Sons organisation, and I was assigned to direct *Sons and Daughters of the Good Earth*, a large-scale movie about Chinese guerrilla activities against the Japanese in the Second World War. I wasn't very lucky, because the production went over budget. None the less, the previews went well, but at about that time Singapore and Malaysia passed a new law forbidding any depiction of racial conflict and chose to apply it to the film. It was cut by about an hour, and the resulting film was meaningless. It was especially serious, because Singapore and Malaysia were then the biggest market areas in South East Asia. I'd been planning a second film on the subject (*Ting Yi-Shan*, the name of a Chinese guerrilla leader) to re-use the costumes and props in order to compensate for overspending on *Sons and Daughters*, but the situation forced us to abandon it.

My second picture, in 1965, was *Come Drink With Me*, an action film that was a great success. I brought in Han Ying-Chieh [since an actor and fight arranger in innumerable Hong Kong films] to 'choreograph' the action scenes, because of his background in Peking Opera. It was the first time that Hong Kong action movies



Yueh Hua and Cheng Pei-Pei in 'Come Drink with Me'

had made use of the Peking Opera tradition. After that, I terminated my contract with Shaws.

What kind of contract did you have?

A little different from the usual one, because I had been contracted primarily as an actor. A director's contract might say that for a certain sum annually he has to direct four movies, and that if he's unable to finish four then he owes the company money back. It might also give the company first option of renewal, and if the director owes the company money, he may be unable to move elsewhere. In my case, I didn't owe them money, but I did owe them two more pictures as an actor. I said I'd do them if they insisted, but I retained the right to choose the scripts. Shaws wanted to keep me, but I wanted a change.

In 1965 I signed with Sha Jung-Feng's Union Film Company, and immediately started to make another historical action film from my own script; that was *Dragon Gate Inn*, and it broke commercial records all over South East Asia, outgrossing even *The Sound of Music*. At Union, I started from scratch. I built the studio for them, bought technical equipment for them, advertised for actors and trained the successful applicants (who included people like Pai Ying, Shangkuan Ling-Feng and Tien Peng), and instructed many of the studio personnel. I worked as both director and production manager for them.

It was the success of *Dragon Gate Inn* that enabled you to make *A Touch of Zen*?

Yes. I'd been attracted to a 4-page story called *Sha Nü* in a collection of ghost and fantasy stories by the Ming Dynasty scholar P'u Sung-Ling [translated as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Herbert Giles, who renders *Sha Nü* as *The Magnanimous Girl*] and wanted to use it as the basis for a film. The story is very simple and lacks any historical background, which made it difficult to expand into a movie script. A series of conversations with friends during the writing led me to the idea of using Zen Buddhism as a theme in my script—I'm not a Buddhist myself, but I was fascinated by the challenge of showing something that cannot be explained by the logical processes

of Western philosophy. It's like trying to explain to someone what 'sweet' is and finding it hard, but then giving them a lump of sugar to taste. Or like trying to describe swimming to someone, and then letting them jump in the water...

Once the script was written, I set about building the main set for the film: the ruined town, which was an open set. It took eight or nine months to construct. After we'd built it, we had to make it look very old, and experimented with a number of ideas to 'age' it convincingly. And then we had to plant grass (a kind of white fern that looks very ghostly) to make it look overgrown, and several big, old trees were transplanted into the set from other places. Although it cost a lot, after I left the company they made a lot of money from it, by renting it out for other movies: around two hundred pictures have been shot there. I built it to last.

It also took a lot of time to find the right locations for other scenes. They were way off the beaten track, and in some cases we had to climb to get to them. In particular, the bamboo forest (where Han Ying-Chieh first confronts the fugitives) was very awkward, because it's in a valley and it only catches the sun for three or four hours a day. It took 25 days to shoot that one 10-minute sequence.

In the middle of shooting, Mr. Sha came to me and said that I was spending too much money. He suggested that I make the film for release in two parts. I agreed to try, although half the film was already shot. Then, when we'd nearly finished, he came along again and said he'd changed his mind: it would be better as a single film. Furious, I pointed out that the film wasn't a piece of elastic that you could stretch out or snap tighter—I'd made it as he requested, and that was all there was to say. Given all these problems, it took about two years to complete the film.

After I'd finished editing, in 1968, I went off to a conference in the United States. While I was away, *A Touch of Zen* was cut down to a single 2-hour film for release. It was a flop, and I never saw it.

After that, you left Union?

Yes, partly because of the way they had treated *A Touch of Zen*, but also because I discovered they had used my name to advertise two more of their pictures in Korea. These were films that I'd never even heard of, despite being their production manager. I first heard about them from a Korean friend, who wrote to say that he was surprised I was doing such poor work. I later discovered that they had sold the pictures to Korea for a higher price on the strength of my *Dragon Gate Inn* reputation. So I left to organise my own little company, for which I've now made *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones*.

You've also collaborated on an independent film with Li Han-Hsiang?

That was during my period at Union, and it was strictly a voluntary thing. Li had left Shaw Brothers to found his own Kou Lien Company, but it had gone broke and he was threatened with arrest if he didn't clear his bank overdraft by a certain date. Li Hsing, Pai Ching-Jui and I got together and agreed to do something to help Li Han-Hsiang. We had no money, but we were worth something as directors, and so we decided to contribute an episode each to a 'quartet' picture, *Four Moods*, with Li Han-Hsiang himself directing the fourth episode. My episode was *Anger*; I based the script on a Peking opera. All four episodes were costume pieces. We did it just to pay the bank. It worked, but Li Han-Hsiang had to rejoin Shaw Brothers afterwards.

Is there any reason why you prefer period subjects?

It's just that I started out doing them, and found them interesting. Also, I'd done research into the history of Chinese literature.

Why do you concentrate on the Ming Dynasty in particular?

It's a particularly controversial period, both in China and among overseas Sinologists; there was a much discussed book by Wu Han about Ming politics. It was on the one hand the period when Western influences first reached China; on the other, it was one of the most corrupt periods in Chinese politics. Most of the Ming emperors were bad: some were drug addicts, some were very young indeed when they came to the throne. Power was effectively in the hands of the Court Eunuchs, who created their own secret service, the '*tung ch'ang*' or 'Eastern Group'. Without exaggeration, you could say that the power of the *tung ch'ang* exceeded that of the German Gestapo. They could arrest and execute virtually anyone, including ministers of the Court, without accountability or, indeed, any legal process. Both *Dragon Gate Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* deal specifically with the operations of the *tung ch'ang*. At the time I made those films, the James Bond movies were very popular, and I thought it very wrong to make a hero of a secret service man. My films were a kind of comment on this.

How closely are your fictions based on historical fact?

Very closely. *The Fate of Lee Khan*, for instance, drew on all the available information about Lee Khan himself... he was a strange man, he *did* have this close relationship with his sister, he *was* assassinated in a remote place while on a tour of inspection.

I did invent the names of the assassins; in history, nobody knows who assassinated him. In *A Touch of Zen*, the girl's father, Yang Lien, was an actual historical character, killed by the *tung ch'ang*.

You're also careful about period detail?

Yes. For instance, the robes of Lee Khan and his sister are genuine antiques, and I had to take special precautions during the shooting to protect them, they were so fragile. You also have to be careful about colour, because there used to be regulations about it. The ordinary people were not allowed to wear red or yellow, for example. Also, some colours did not exist as dyes at certain periods. As for costume design in general, we were influenced by Peking Opera, and by those local operas and plays, and I supplemented such influences with my own research into old paintings and other records. Things like details of an official's dress are easy to discover, because they're well documented; it's harder to find out about the common people.

Your films blend this historical accuracy with distinct elements of fantasy, especially in the action scenes...

I've always taken the action part of my films as dancing rather than fighting. Because I'm very interested in the Peking Opera, and particularly its movement and action effects, although I think it's difficult to express them adequately on stage... the physical limitations are too great. A lot of people in Hong Kong have misunderstood me, and have remarked that my action scenes are sometimes 'authentic', sometimes not. In point of fact, they're always keyed to the notion of dance. In *A Touch of Zen* I used Peking Opera music with the action scenes, to emphasise the rhythm and tempo, instead of making them more 'authentic' or realistic. Everything is sketched in advance.

Does that have a specific Zen Buddhist connotation in the film?

Not a specific one: that's why I called it 'a touch of Zen'. The same goes for the sun and moon imagery, and for Chiao Hung's role as the monk Hui-Yuan: the scenes with him can sustain both a 'rational' and a Buddhist interpretation. The moment when

he bleeds gold, for example, could be taken as the subjective vision of Han Ying-Chieh, deranged in his dying moments; or, in Buddhist terms, it's *tien hua*, a *hint* that Hui-Yuan is a real Buddha.

Why do you use the same actors so often?

I suppose it's because it's easier to communicate—if I say I want this or that, they'll understand. Hsu Feng and Pai Ying were among the actors I trained at Union... Angela Mao [Mao Ying] came to me then too, but she was too young, and so I didn't use her until *The Fate of Lee Khan*... Hu Chin was in my episode of *Four Moods*... Tien Feng, who played Lee Khan, used to be an assistant director.

Do you have your cast in mind when you write a script?

The leads, maybe, but not all of them. If I write an outline, I also find that I need to visit the locales I'm writing about. I find it impossible to establish atmosphere in a script, I need to see the place. I always prefer to work on location; the perspectives are always greater.

What are your current projects?

I'm writing two stories, *The Great Magician* and *Rain in the Mountains*. The first is set in an extremely remote mountain region of China, and deals with a clash between a herbal doctor who arrives there, and the witch who controls the people through superstition and who is in league with the local authorities. The doctor is eventually driven to emulate the witch's tactics to get through to the people, and the film questions whether he's right to do so, however honourable his motives.

The second is about Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism at the time that Western influences first impinged on China. The missionaries arrived and brought astronomy, mechanical sciences and weaponry. The main thing is that I'll do it very objectively, because I don't claim to know what the exact consequences of Western influence were. The film describes the very beginning. It's a fiction: it's about a crown prince who runs away when the Manchurians take over, and about the various influences exerted on him in

attempts to decide his best course of future action.

You're also an author.

I'm writing a biography of Lao She, the novelist who died in 1969. He was a Manchurian, born in 1899; he was the only writer who used Peking dialect to write his books. I suppose he's best known in the West for *The Rickshaw Man*, but his work has been translated into at least twelve languages.

Do your film interests relate to your interest in Chinese history and literature?

I think that they are largely something separate.

NOTES ON FOUR FILMS

King Hu's progress through the industry that gave him his first serious job—from the largest of the major studios, through the youngest of minor studios and on to complete independence—is all but a process of disengagement. The corollary of this is the extraordinary consistency of his work, which makes it a cinch for auteurist analysis; rarely has a 'commercial' director remained so impervious to the 'house styles' of the studios where he worked, or so faithful to his own preferred themes, motifs and style. Hindsight reveals Hu's influence at work in some of the other Chinese martial arts movies that have reached Britain (notably Chang Cheh's *Golden Swallow* and Wu Ma's *Deaf and Mute Heroine*, both of interest in themselves), but such influence seems to have been both superficial and rather short-lived, especially since the craze for 'kung fu' movies died out during 1973. Along with Chang Cheh, whose recent movies have centred on genuinely expert martial artistry *per se*, Hu is one of the few Chinese directors still working in the 'period action' genre, and the chief reason that he's able to do so is that his films deviate so extensively from the genre's norms; his introduction of codes and conventions from the Peking Opera was no more than the start of what amounts to a reinvention of the genre in his own terms.

PLOT

Since Hu has no truck with the kind of rivalry and revenge mechanisms that power most martial arts movies, it's not surprising that his approach to questions of dramatic construction owes nothing to the genre's usual stark functionalism. In fact, all the four films seen here are noticeably unorthodox in their plotting. The most extreme example is *A Touch of Zen*, an epic narrative that proceeds through a series of redefinitions of its own terms: apparently beginning as a ghost story, then revealing its 'ghosts' as tactical tricks in an all-too-human battle campaign, and then elevating its human conflicts to a very different supernatural (metaphysical?) level. And the redefinitions are accompanied by constant enlargements in the narrative perspective; retrospectively, the minutely detailed exposition comes to be seen as a mere hiatus in

Hsu Feng and Pai Ying in 'The Valiant Ones'



the quest that gives the film its overall design. Conventionally linear plotting is kept to a minimum in the opening scenes of *The Fate of Lee Khan* (where the resulting sense of confusion sets the context for the political thrust of the later action), and dispensed with entirely for much of *The Valiant Ones* (where most of the narrative developments occur *between* scenes rather than during them).

Underpinning these formal inventions is Hu's exceptional capacity for narrative compression, which finds exemplary definition in *Anger*, his contribution to *Four Moods*. Apart from a brief prologue which situates the action historically (and thus politically), the film observes a strict unity of time and place. Like a prototype for *Lee Khan*, it's set in an inn, and concerns the cross-purposes of its various inhabitants during one night and the following morning. The proprietress (Hu Chin) is a receiver of stolen goods, and runs the place as a front for various other criminal activities; her overnight guests are political prisoner Wang Chiao-Hsun, the guards escorting him to an island jail, and the mysterious Jen Tang-Hui, who poses as a businessman but is actually there to free Wang. No effort is wasted on rationalisations or explications; Hu simply meshes together his characters—each with some hidden motive—with the same good-humoured dexterity that informs *Lee Khan*, and then orchestrates the tensions that inevitably spring up between them in outbursts of florid martial action. The *mise en scène* meanwhile tends towards Sternberg-like abstraction, with attention lavished on light, shade, colour and texture. It's the very mixture of concrete and 'abstract' elements that makes the result so pregnant: not just the play between political action and fantastic, balletic fights, but the way that each precise detail (the precision if anything heightened by the lack of back-up explanation) is put to both material and figurative use.

This kind of expressionism is, of course, a comfortable idiom for any generic action movie that looks to carry out most of its signifying at a purely visual level. Hu takes it much further than most directors, however, partly because he's tapping exceptionally rich graphic and dramatic traditions in his composition and design, but also because his non-linear way with narrative throws unusual weight on to the internal dynamics of individual scenes and shots.

This is nowhere truer than in *The Valiant Ones*, where each scene is a virtual set piece. The film chronicles the efforts of Chinese official Yu Ta-Yu (Chiao Hung) to eradicate one of the many Sino-Japanese pirate bands ravaging the Chinese coastline during the Ming Dynasty; the fact that the pirates have bribed most local officers forces him to turn to civilian friends for help. His unusual tactics—extending to elaborate ambushes, bluffs and counter-bluffs and the use of explosives—eventually meet with success, albeit at great cost to his friends; but his subsequent failure to pay a bribe himself earns him demotion as a reward. As in *Lee Khan*, the fictional story is a cypher for the historical facts, on which the film quietly insists in its opening and closing narrations. (The introduction further juxtaposes Ming portraits of the

emperor Chia Ching and the chief pirates with brief shots of the actors who will impersonate them, thus stressing the film's basis in diligent research.)

But the narrative is actually held in suspension for most of the film, its occasional shifts in direction being signalled by nothing more than glimpses of Yu Ta-Yu explaining his latest strategies to his corrupt or weak court superiors. For the rest, each individual scene centres on action in the field and usually depicts a physical or psychological skirmish of some sort; each is inconclusive in narrative terms, but at the same time more or less self-contained formally. In consequence, the film has two parallel diegeses, which are neither autonomous nor completely dependent on each other. One is the 'suspended' historical narrative, which is explicitly left 'unfinished' or open-ended: Yu Ta-Yu is first seen *in medias res* (as if the film's action began at an arbitrary point), and the final shots of him mourning his dead colleagues are accompanied by a narration remarking the smallness of his gain and pointing out that pirates continued their plunder of China for more than a century. The other is the very fabric of the film's action: the pointed variations on the theme of military strategy, the split-second choreography of its physical manoeuvres, the extraordinary editing with its rhetoric of repetitions and alterations, and the clear-eyed celebration of solidarity between honest officials and Chinese civilians in the fight for social reform.

SYNTAX

Although he works much more slowly and painstakingly than his contemporaries in the Hong Kong film industry, Hu shares with many of them a preference for editing his films in camera, in so far as he uses a new camera set-up for almost every shot. (The Western technique of basing a scene on a master take and then cutting in to close-ups, reverse-field shots and so on is used very rarely indeed.) The immediate effect of this is to eliminate (or at least counter) the staidness of 'classic' narrative exposition as it is still extensively practised in Hollywood, but to substitute for it an editing rhetoric of close-ups, zooms and pans that can rapidly become equally formulaic. Except when he consciously exploits it, as

throughout *The Valiant Ones*, Hu keeps this tendency to rhetoric very much in check. The syntax of his films is accordingly volatile and unpredictable (in *A Touch of Zen* it even admits multi-screen in one sequence, and switches to colour negative in another), although never less than purposive and carefully reasoned.

The actual construction of individual shots and sequences in his films naturally depends on context and intention, but Hu's general lack of interest in linearity finds a correlative in one consistent tactical trait: where the circumstances of shooting deny him much 'natural' depth of field (as in most studio interior work), he works to create it by means of tracking shots and other deliberate shifts in perspective. Conversely, he films location exteriors almost exclusively in static shots and pans, and is much readier to fragment continuous motion through editing in such scenes. This trait was already evident in Hu's contribution to Li Han-Hsiang's *Eternal Love* in 1962. Shot entirely in the studio (like the rest of the film), his scenes with the future lovers Shan-Po and Ying-Tai settling into school routine are distinguished by long, mobile takes that push the limitations of the sets to the extreme. There, the visual syntax refreshes and even partially transcends the opera conventions to which the film is otherwise subservient.

A Touch of Zen accomplishes its complex trajectory—from the mundane life of the impoverished painter-scholar Ku Sheng-Chai to the sublime transfiguration of the Buddhist monk Hui-Yuan—as much through variation and experiment in its syntax as through the plot itself. The opening scenes, with Ku (Shih Chun) becoming embroiled in what he imagines to be a ghostly visitation but is in fact a political vendetta, generate unease by using structures that are in some way unresolved: scenes that break off before they're 'complete', discontinuities of action, tracking shots that lead 'nowhere', clashes of idiom (such as naturalism versus expressionism) that achieve no 'synthesis'. When the plot comes to admit a measure of clarification, it's appropriate that it should do so in the form of two flashbacks that are structurally 'complete' in themselves. But at the same time subtle inflections in the syntax (a quickening tempo in the editing, a newly lyric tone in the montages, a sudden expansiveness in the pans) are broadening the action's perspectives, clearing the way for the revelation that the drama is still not entirely what it appears to be. The climactic scenes are dazzling set pieces, each in turn more densely constructed, each resolving an earlier 'gap' or question, and each—through the steady escalation of 'fantastic' elements—leading the drama further into the limitless metaphysical realms of its ending.

The stylistic rhetoric that dominates *The Valiant Ones* springs from the film's genre elements, which are much stronger than in the other films: the frequency of fights, the emphasis on martial prowess, the 'tournament' scene in which two of the stars are challenged to display their martial skills. Disdaining the idea of using such elements as an end in themselves, Hu rather exploits their conventionality (and popularity, no doubt) by using them as the basis for daring experiments on a syntactic level. All the

'A Touch of Zen': Hsu Feng, Pai Ying



major fight scenes are constructed from countless very short shots, edited with astonishing precision to percussive scores (from Peking Opera) while retaining the full momentum of the physical action. The artifice is pushed further by 'clusters' of near-identical shots: a blow or a movement is sometimes shown several times in ultra-rapid succession. The effect of this rhetoric in the editing is not just to banish notions of 'realism' but also to raise sections of the action to a virtually abstract plane of expression.

ACTION

Along with some of the costume design, it's the action sequences in Hu's films that bear the strongest imprint of a Peking Opera influence. Pitched at a level of basic artifice

(political, spiritual) kinds of combat, picking up thematic and narrative threads and *developing* them. And in *The Valiant Ones*, in so far as this is a film about strategy, they themselves constitute the theme.

The stalemate at Spring Inn in *Lee Khan* is underpinned by the metaphor of a chequer-board: Lee Khan divides the inn with strict lines of demarcation and prohibited areas, and uses them to regulate the passage of characters to and fro. *The Valiant Ones* extends the metaphor to make the link with the theme of strategy more explicit: the Chinese patriots play chequers as they await an expected pirate attack and then, as their look-outs report the approach of their attackers, they turn the chequer-board into a map of battle, using individual chequers to keep a number tally and moves to signal instructions wordlessly to the others. In both cases, the metaphor rests on the (political) concept of teamwork. None of

Given that the quality of anamorphic lenses available in Hong Kong effectively rules out deep focus composition, the values that Hu draws from his imagery through his control of colour and composition are the more remarkable. Examples are legion, from the use of 'matching' colours to intimate solidarity in *Lee Khan* to the comic deployment of the inn's fixtures and fittings in combat in *Anger*.

A Touch of Zen, whose scale of conception exceeds the other films in almost every respect, achieves its 'transcendental' climax mainly through forceful re-emphasis of its basic imagery. Hsu (Han Ying-Chieh), leader of the *tung ch'ang*, finally 'corners' his prey in a bamboo forest and is on the point of killing them when the monk Hui-Yuan (Chiao Hung) appears and intervenes. Hui-Yuan, in saffron robes, has already been associated with the sun in earlier appearances; he now appears with the sun



'The Valiant Ones'

that permits the actors to all but fly, his fights are unique in the genre for their mixture of delirious stylisation and formal choreography; as Hu explains in the interview here, they are arranged by Han Ying-Chieh (himself a protagonist in several of the most spectacular examples, including the climactic bout of *A Touch of Zen*), who was originally trained in Peking Opera stagecraft and acrobatics. Beyond their considerable aesthetic qualities, though, the fight scenes are remarkable for the semantic weight they carry in relation to the surrounding action.

It is partly just a question of idiom. In *Anger*, for instance, the inn's proprietress is disturbed at her accounts by the late arrival of a visitor seeking lodging and somersaults down from the balcony to open the door to him; the 'magical' gesture is assimilated into the naturalistic flow of the action, expressing the woman's impatience and speeding the exposition on its way. But Hu takes the integration process further still. In *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *A Touch of Zen*, the fights become cyphers for other

Hu's films evidences much interest in individual heroism: both Lee Khan and the Japanese pirate Hakatatsu are ultimately defeated by groups of patriots, individuals collaborating towards a desired political end.

In *A Touch of Zen*, the political fugitive Yang Hui-Chen (Hsu Feng) and her loyal generals (Pai Ying and Hsueh Han) meet the first full-scale attack from the *tung ch'ang* not only with swords, but with a battery of 'special effects' designed to make their headquarters appear haunted. After the battle, Ku, creator of all the trip-wires, dummies and booby traps, roars with laughter as he inspects his handiwork in the light of day. Here, too, a metaphor is at work: the film exposes the mechanics of one kind of strategy in order to shift its own ground to the depiction of another kind.

IMAGERY

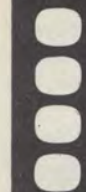
Hu's expressionism, historical naturalism and poetically charged fights all rest for their effect on the strength of his imagery.

directly behind him, so that his glide forward into the arena of combat seems almost propelled by solar energy. During the magisterial clash of giants that follows, the split-second cutting redoubles the force of the image by making Hui-Yuan appear himself a source of light. This in turn prepares for the monk's transfiguration in the final scene: treacherously stabbed by Hsu, he bleeds gold and turns to the sun, as if regaining energy from it. . .

Whether the scene is read literally or figuratively ultimately makes no difference to its meaning: Hui-Yuan's traditional role, and his intervention on the side of the rebels against Ming court corruption, identify him as a representative of China's past, and make of his clash with Hsu in effect an allegory of China's struggle for national identity in a period of particular turmoil. The imagery blends touches of politics, history and aesthetics as well as 'zen', and in the blending lies Hu's mastery. ■

I am indebted to T. H. Cheah for help in the preparation of this article.—T. R.

IN THE PICTURE



London Festival

Each year, SIGHT AND SOUND's press date creeps a few days forward (Christmas holidays, it will have been noted, are not getting any shorter); each year, the London Festival seems determined to crowd in more titles. This time, unhappily, collision: to our chagrin, the 1975 Festival remains almost unreported in this issue, since it wasn't possible to see even a reasonable proportion of the new films on display in the available time.

It's a far-flung selection of some sixty titles, with a startling number of the films running in tandem: two from Satyajit Ray (*The Middle Man* and *The Golden Fortress*), two from Rossellini (*Italy Year One* and *The Messiah*), two each from Borowczyk, Chabrol, Werner Herzog, and three—all 1975 films—from the indefatigable Fassbinder.

Also, and slightly ominously, the Festival boasts that it's able to show all the major prize-winners from 1975's previous events, from Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala* (Moscow) to the Algerian heavy-weight *Chronicle of the Years of Embers* which scored at Cannes, Locarno's *The Son of Amr is Dead* and San Sebastian's *Poachers*. Ominously, because here's further evidence of how relatively little of the foreign product is currently reaching London commercial cinemas, and how belatedly much of that little arrives. A few years ago, the London Festival was beginning to look rather like a preview: one expected a good deal of what it showed to turn up within the year in the normal course of things. Now, disconcertingly few of the festival films are coming with distribution plans already fixed. There are some courageous London exhibitors, from the old Academy to the new Gate, and at the moment courage seems to be

needed. Whatever the reasons, the chance of seeing new work from abroad in a London cinema is probably rather less now than it was a decade ago.

All this, of course, makes the London Festival more rather than less significant. Perhaps in 1975 it's offering simply too much: a round-up rather than a festival. But the temptation to corral everything within sight, and one or two perhaps better left out of sight, must be strong. If London were competitive (which happily it isn't), a strong tip at the time of writing would be Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players*, Anglicised in title since I wrote about it from Cannes as *O Thissos*, and a work of major historical significance. SIGHT AND SOUND festival reports in our Summer and Autumn issues of 1975 have already of course covered a fair proportion of the London entries; and in this issue *A Touch of Zen*, *Moses and Aaron*, *Jeanne Dielman* and *India Song* are discussed at some length in separate articles. In subsequent issues, we hope to catch up with some of the missing.

And, of course, there is the British contingent, headed by an opening night double bill of *Winstanley* (see our last issue) and *Requiem for a Village*. Of the festival's British entries, five come from the BFI Production Board, one from the Arts Council and one from the National Film School. Ken Wlaschin, in his introduction to the Festival booklet, suggests that the spirit of Free Cinema may be rising again; tentatively, one may hope that *something* is rising, as a counterweight to the *Confessions* and *Carry Ons*. The 'documentary' tradition (which does not, of course, necessarily express itself through documentary) is still the one that British cinema must look back to, whether it finds its new form in *Winstanley* or in *Juvenile Liaison*.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

The Bad News Bears

'Everybody assumes we're doing some kind of scathing indictment of the Little League, but we're not interested in that,' Michael Ritchie said last August on location for his latest look at an American institution, Paramount's comedy *The Bad News Bears*. 'It's not a Disney movie, yet it's the kind of movie I hope will make the audience feel good at the end.' Like *Smile*, Ritchie's dissection of a California beauty contest, the new film deals with the effect of the American success syndrome on a group of youngsters, in this case a bedraggled baseball team whipped into shape by a spit-balling girl pitcher, Tatum O'Neal, and an alcoholic coach, Walter Matthau. The Little League has come under attack in recent years for pushing youngsters into stressful competitive situations, and has also been the target of court challenges by girls trying to liberate its ranks. So, despite Ritchie's insistence that baseball is simply 'a metaphor for these scruffy kids coming to terms with life,' the film seems bound to assume topical, if not controversial, significance.

Ritchie's defensiveness probably was occasioned by the Hollywood reviews of *Smile*, which took him to task for making a facile put-down of an easy target. New York reviewers, perhaps because of their distance from the California life style Ritchie was satirising, were much kinder to the film when it eventually opened there; Pauline Kael even called it a 'salute to the square'. But when shooting began on *The Bad News Bears*, Ritchie stood accused of misanthropy, and his film was getting an equally poor response from the public. 'Michael is making this film to

prove that he has a heart,' a crew member said.

'I really enjoyed working with those kids on *Smile*, and that's one reason I was attracted to this project,' Ritchie said. 'Working with them is fun, because it's all new. It's complicated for matching purposes, because nothing happens the same way twice, and sometimes it's hard when you have to tell them to do something fifteen times, but it's exciting in a kind of Svengali sense. This isn't a star vehicle; it's very much of an ensemble picture.' Some of the kids are neophytes, such as the team's chubby catcher Gary Lee Cavnagaro, but others are relatively experienced child actors, including Alfred Lutter, Ellen Burstyn's son in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and the young Woody Allen in *Love and Death*, and Jackie Earle Haley, the child monster attacked by Donald Sutherland in *The Day of the Locust*.

Tatum O'Neal, playing her first film role since her Oscar-winning debut in *Paper Moon* (not counting a cameo in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*), is one of the most highly paid actresses in Hollywood today, and her father rejected many offers before allowing her to play in *The Bad News Bears*. Tatum, aged 11, is receiving the highest salary ever paid to a child star, a staggering \$350,000, plus eight per cent of the net profits and an additional one per cent of the gross after the break-even point, up to a total of \$13,000,000. When the figures were reported in *Variety*, some of her team-mates were understandably jealous. 'I wanna win two Academy Awards in this movie, not just one,' said a disgruntled Bear.

The filming was a physical ordeal for the kids, because the

'The Bad News Bears': Tatum O'Neal, Walter Matthau



baseball diamond where most of the action takes place was situated in the sun-ravaged San Fernando Valley, the Los Angeles area's equivalent of Death Valley. Temperatures were around 100° every day, and the heavy yellow-green smog cover was a ghastly sight. The production designer, Polly Platt, looked around for an existing diamond to use for the film, but couldn't find one which wasn't surrounded by apartment complexes, taco stands and shopping centres. She wanted a setting 'isolated from everything', to emphasise the kids' feeling that the game is the centre of their lives; at her suggestion, the final version of Bill Lancaster's screenplay minimised scenes away from the diamond. The setting she built was done in bright, bold colours, an oasis-like contrast to the drab architecture and dried-out grass of the Valley itself. Polly Platt, the former wife and collaborator of Peter Bogdanovich, previously designed and co-wrote what is probably the most bitingly accurate screen depiction of San Fernando Valley aridity, *Targets*.

Matthau waited patiently while Ritchie cajoled the wilting young actors between takes. 'Fellas,' Ritchie complained, 'you weren't all looking at Walter. I don't want to have to say it every time. Understand?' He clapped his hands: 'When you hear this sound, it means you're actors.' They were doing a scene in which Matthau, guzzling a beer, orders them to run laps around the field, telling them, 'As the great Duke Snider once said, no player can perform to capacity unless he's in top physical condition. That means only one thing—start running.'

Matthau blew his lines once, and Cavagnaro sassed, 'Why did you mess it up?' Another player picked up the taunt, and Ritchie, stern as a schoolmaster, told them to be quiet. Looking far more benign than the W. C. Fields-Clifton Webb type of character he plays in the film, Matthau took it with grace ('he's very well mannered,' Lutter commented). The shot was ready to be tried again, and Ritchie said, almost pleadingly, 'If you guys run fast, this will be the last one.' Cameraman John Alonzo, pacing in front of them like a drill sergeant, snapped, 'No more looking in the lens!'

JOSEPH MCBRIDE

Poachers

The success of *Furtivos* (*Poachers*), produced, written and directed by José Luis Borau, at the San Sebastian Festival last September was the culmination of Borau's battle with the Spanish cinema bureaucracy, a barely credible tale of ministerial evasiveness, during which it seemed that the film would not be released because of Borau's refusal to cut. The cuts demanded included erotic scenes, swear words and authentic details, like the Civil Governor's use of his official car to go shooting. If the film was not released, of course,



'Poachers': José Luis Borau as the Civil Governor

Borau as producer would not be able to recoup. 'I'm obviously very glad to have the San Sebastian award,' Borau has said, 'but what I'm proudest of is my victory over the censor.' In fact the censor only yielded when the film, selected to represent Spain officially at San Sebastian, was due to open shortly in Madrid. The only cut is nugatory; a shot of the front of the Civil Government building in Segovia.

One of the censor's objections was to a scene where the Civil Governor (convincingly played by Borau himself since José Luis López Vázquez, for whom the part was intended, was unavailable) arrives in the forest to shoot deer and says: 'What peace one inhales in this forest.' There was a phrase of Franco's in the 1960s: 'Spain is a peaceful forest.' As Borau has said, 'The forest is a symbol of our country and of our way of life.' This was underlined in the film's publicity: 'What is rotting beneath the silence of a peaceful forest?'

Poachers, in Borau's words, shows that 'Spain is a cruel mother who devours her children.' The film contains 'the tragedy of Spain', the brutality, the incest, the fratricidal strife of a country which has suffered four civil wars in under two centuries. The tragedy of the mother (played by Lola Gao, familiar from *Tristana*), her son Angel and daughter-in-law, is observed by the Civil Governor, foster child of the mother and representative of the ineffectual bureaucracy of the regime. It is the Civil Governor who emasculates his half-brother Angel, removing his *raison d'être* as a poacher when he makes him a forest warden. This scene is the one that, as Borau says, 'sums up the film.'

This incident is a part of the infernal machine that results in the slaying of Angel's wife by his mother, and his killing of his mother and subsequent suicide, a

suicide portrayed in the alternative ending where Civil Governor and Civil Guards arrive to discover the tragedy, which Borau decided to cut from the final print. It is the Civil Governor and the system he represents that are responsible for making the other characters *furtivos*, yet the Governor is himself a *furtivo* in his secret envy of the poacher's life. Borau has pointed out that a *furtivo* 'is anyone who does something in a secret or furtive way,' so the translation is inadequate because 'poachers' only conveys one level of meaning. It is an apt metaphor for a country with frequent financial scandals, where mayors take the lead in land speculation and the construction of workers' flats which soon collapse. (It is not surprising that Rosi's *Hands Across the City* remains banned in Spain.)

Poachers manifests a complete respect for contemporary Spanish reality. It contains a *quínqui* or bandit called 'El Cuqui', who returns to collect his girl, escaped from a reformatory and now living in the forest married to Angel. Shortly after the film's completion, the newspapers noticed a bandit called 'El Cuqui' and his affair with a girl now in a reformatory in Alcalá de Henares. It is this sort of relevance, of creative foresight, that *Poachers* shares with Berlanga's *The Executioner*, whose recent release coincided with the executions of five urban guerrillas.

Borau's earlier film *B Must Die* (1973), a Swiss co-production made in Spain and set in an imaginary South American country, posits a dialectic on the absurdity of nationalism; that, in Borau's words, 'A person belongs to the country where he lives and works,' and of how an individual is incapable of achieving anything by himself. Borau says of it, 'I wanted to make an Unamuno-type film in the sense that the characters were going to have only the necessary "flesh" for us to believe in them as people.'

B Must Die is about the limits of individual freedom. Pal (Darren McGavin) is not free because of his dream of returning to his native Hungary, and his wish to make this dream a reality destroys him. Similarly, the characters in *Poachers* have been deprived of the freedom they need in order to live. It is not strange to discover Borau's admiration for the novels of Pio Baroja, whose trilogy *La Lucha por La Vida* (*The Struggle to Live*) deals with similar problems in Madrid at the turn of the century. Borau also admires Baroja's narrative technique, or rather, absence of it; that is, Baroja is less interested in ramifications of plot than in reflections on the fate of his characters. Borau, and Baroja, would agree with Azaña, President of the Second Republic: 'Liberty doesn't make men happy; it merely makes them men.'

ROGER MORTIMORE

Pesaro 1975

Four years ago, Pesaro was an event bristling with polemic debate, a festival for film-makers engaged in defining the frontiers of Third World cinema, on whose arguments the non-film-making interested party cavedropped with some enthusiasm. In 1975, Pesaro was a decidedly low-key event, muted by the general mood of retrenchment. Saddest was the dearth of important new work from Latin America. The best of what was shown had already appeared at festivals elsewhere, and the rest fell within the rather predictable exposé or documentary mould. There were few directors in evidence, no sense of ideological confrontation, and the lonely figure of Glauber Rocha, mutely patrolling the fringes of the festival, provided an all too apt gauge of changed times.

The festival was organised around two retrospectives—a re-

assessment of the Brazilian *cinema novo* which Pesaro had championed in previous years, and a retrospective of Italian cinema from 1929 to 1943, the neglected 'fascist' period. The Brazilian retrospective placed a full selection of familiar key works in the context of films by less well known directors such as Saraceni, Roberto Farias and Arnaldo Jabor, revealing a movement of perhaps unexpected coherence.

Cinco Vezes Favela, a compendium of five tales by different directors, provided a *locus classicus* for the *cinema novo's* most heavily neo-realist influenced phase, and an almost textbook illustration of the pitfalls of transplanted neo-realism, telling more about the fantasies of its creators and less about the realities of its slum dwellers' existence. Nelson Pereira Dos Santos' seminal *Rio Zone Norte*, with its quaint folk hero (played by Grande Otelo) dying by literally samba-ing his way off a moving train, looked uncomfortably suspect as well. More rewarding were the films that derived from a transference of interest away from the *favela* and simultaneously out into the *sertao* and inwards into that 'perplexity in the face of poverty' which Carlos Diegues located as the prime emotion behind the 'ingenuous' *Cinco Vezes*; a perplexity which under further examination yielded lashings of guilt and a growing sense of impasse.

Dos Santos proved a director whose work seemed to provide an accurate measure of current states of consciousness, and his *Fome de Amor* stands as a kind of monument to the plight of the socially conscious film-maker in Brazil. It follows a young couple from voluntary exile in New York to a desert island limbo where they find their lives impinged on by those of a revolutionary intellectual, now blind and speechless, and his wife, who may or may not be in the employ of the CIA and who diverts herself by locking her husband into Nabokovian situations. Dos Santos, handling his scenario with rare restraint and total conviction, depicts the left as caught between a naïve, if correct, search for 'the people' and the hysterical paroxysms of the writer.

The films that espoused the *sertao* as a wider metaphor for underdevelopment seemed prey both to impenetrable metaphysics and to a kind of languor alternating with hysteria that brought Dos Santos' paralysed intellectual instantly to mind. Glauber Rocha was in fact confirmed as the only director able successfully to make the imaginative leap into the world of folk myth or to pull those hysterical panoramas into anything like a workable polemic shape. Rocha, too, ended up with the only new Brazilian film (made outside Brazil) worthy of note. His *History of Brazil* (made with Marcos Medeiros) is a vast assemblage of film clips and newsreel, counterpointed by a flat voice-over delivering a block of radical-

historical text. It is a challenging and bravura work, and incidentally the only film to call into question the streak of machismo that runs unquestioned through innumerable 'progressive' Latin American films.

If the faults and failings of *cinema novo* became depressingly obvious, the retrospective event also gave one the chance to confirm the brilliance of Gustavo Dahl's *O Bravo Guerreiro* (and lament the fact that his latest film wasn't included), which seems to put its finger on the movement's most important achievement, the framing of a viable film language in which to examine the sense of colonialism, of underdevelopment and impasse.

The Italian programme centred on the work of three key but very different directors: Alessandro Blasetti, Mario Camerini and Ferdinando Maria Poggioli. Given the peremptory bundling together of the films of this period under a single broadly escapist or propagandist umbrella, this retrospective proved invaluable, incidentally supplying the sense of discovery lacking elsewhere at Pesaro, and suggesting that a reassessment of the period is long overdue.

Alongside the early expressionist works, the later, flatter and heavily Hollywood influenced films carry a certain disappointment. Camerini's *T'Amo Sempre*, despite the director's light touch, radiates a sense of (just) masked desperation, as its heroine, a woman of infinitely superior resource to either of her suitors, is shown settling for the most crippling option open to her in the name of preserving the *status quo*. The repressive aspect of the melodrama reached its bleak heights in Poggioli's *Sisignora* (1941), a monolithically cheerless variation on the theme of noble suffering, underscoring the domination of a social order which Poggioli describes in intensely stiff and arid imagery. Blasetti's *La Tavola dei Poveri* developed a noxious but interesting and highly assured hymn to the impoverished aris-

toocracy; while in *Quattro Passi fra le Nuvole* he handles the sense of displacement resulting from the absent-minded decision of a young traveller to help a strange girl by impersonating her (non-existent) husband with evident delight and a Capraesque sense of comedy.

It is one of the ironies of cinema history that the heart of the Mussolini regime should have lain with the resuscitated costume drama. Blasetti's *La Corona di Ferro*, a theatrical pot pourri which drew peals of enthusiastic laughter from a packed house, contrives to do the impossible in taking the Nibelungen as its primary source of inspiration, and simultaneously looking back to the Maciste films, sideways at the Tarzan series and forward to Steve Reeves. The energy with which Blasetti builds this fable into legendary dimensions, the relish for incongruity, and the anarchic final scene in which power is simply and disconcertingly tossed from hand to hand, raise questions about the degree of irony in Blasetti's approach and suggest that there may have been more method than madness in his strategies. His *La Cena delle Beffe* was even more extreme. Loathed by the censor of the time, it is an almost literally hysterical and ferociously operatic film, marked by its inescapable aura of sexual perversity. Blasetti's bravura style is given full play, cutting from evocative deep focus to close-ups of faces disturbingly criss-crossed with shadows which heighten the effect of an explosive emotional tension. The Italian retrospective, in fact, suggested intriguing ways of reading the relationship of political to cultural history, cinema to ideology.

VERINA GLAESSNER

Tehran: Children

The Tenth Tehran International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults seemed an echo of the ninth. Another distinguished jury gave the Grand Prix to Czechoslovakia, where the few

major talents able to work seem confined to children's films. Once again Iran's own determined efforts in the same field were recognised — though this jury deftly coupled expressions of gratitude for their hosts' lavish hospitality with a hint that they might be more selective in accepting festival entries.

The festival is run by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, a body whose worthy endeavours illuminate some of Iran's more howling contradictions. A staff six hundred strong musters massive efforts and apparently limitless funds to spread stimulating words, images and experiences through a vast country where education, compulsory for forty years, has been free for only twelve months, where most children begin school when they're seven and finish at twelve, and where film-makers and writers find their work more autocratically forbidden than fostered.

Ten of the eleven Iranian films in competition were produced by the Film Centre of the Institute. The accomplishment of the five animated and six live entries was extraordinarily high, but such simple pleasures as Nafiseh Riahi's *Purple Crayon* and Abbas Kia-Rostami's *So Can I* and *Two Solutions to One Problem* seemed almost uniquely direct in their instructional aim. Malek Khorshid, Ali-Akbar Sadeghi's deliciously animated Persian miniature myth, Nooreddin Zarrinkelk's *The Mad, Mad, Mad World*, an original animated interpretation of an atlas, and Massoud Kimiai's *The Oriental Boy* each successfully focused on more ambitious albeit more adult targets, but some other Institute work was understandably attacked as self-indulgence which would merely bewilder its supposed audience.

Czechoslovakia's Grand Prix winner, Frantisek Vlácil's *Sirius*, tells how a boy has to sacrifice his dog during the German occupation. Such anguish must be borne, the film suggests, all things pass, and the very constellations are impermanent. The jury noted the 'outstanding concept' as well as Vlácil's skilful direction. *Sirius* is an essentially serious work, and no one begrudged its triumph over Ray's *Golden Fortress* or Tati's *Parade*.

The festival's most substantial surprise was Bulgaria's *With Nobody*, Ivanka Grubcheva's intensely thoughtful feature about a boy's experiences as his parents divorce. Practically every other success was animated, with Canada's *The Owl Who Married a Goose, Da Da Da* and *Through a Broken Pane* equalling the Czech and Iranian work in originality and appeal. But despite new award regulations, the presentation and competition of live features, animated shorts, instructional and entertainment films, to say nothing of films for and films about children, still gives the festival a hazy, though opulent, image.

DEREK HILL

'Aces High': Jack Gold's *Flying Corps* adaptation of 'Journey's End'



1975: Obituary

DECEMBER '74: Anatole Litvak, Russian-born director who after working in Germany and France, where he made *Mayerling*, went to Hollywood in the 1930s (*The Snake Pit*, *All This and Heaven Too*); Henry Wadsworth, juvenile lead of the silent cinema; Jack Benny, veteran American radio and TV comedian occasionally seen in films (*To Be or Not To Be*); Pietro Germi, Italian director, notably of black satires (*Divorce Italian Style*, *Seduced and Abandoned*).

JANUARY: Gertrude Olmsted, leading lady of silent Westerns who also appeared in the original *Ben-Hur*; John Baxter, producer-director of influential British films in the 1930s and '40s (*Love on the Dole*, *Let the People Sing*); Marie Lohr, actress who specialised in stately dowagers (*Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara*); Felix Máriássy, Hungarian director (*Spring in Budapest*, *A Glass of Beer*, *Relatives*); Lyubov Orlova, vivacious Russian star of light musicals directed by her husband, Grigori Alexandrov (*Jazz Comedy*, *Volga-Volga*); Fosco Giachetti, Italian actor who played patriotic heroes in the Mussolini era (*Bengasi*, *Squadron Bianco*); John Gregson, resilient down-to-earth hero of British comedies (*Genevieve*) and war films; John Slater, actor of Cockney characters and innumerable men in blue; Pierre Fresnay, French actor whose career included both saints (*Monsieur Vincent*) and sinners (*Marius*), but who will be best remembered as the quintessentially civilised de Boeldieu in *La Grande Illusion*.

FEBRUARY: Richard Wattis, character actor, bespectacled epitome of Whitehall officialdom; Denis Goodwin, British comedy scriptwriter, mainly for television and radio; Robert Strauss, veteran American character actor (*Stalag 17*, *The Seven Year Itch*); Lord Archibald, Glasgow-born film projectionist who rose to become one of the more influential film industry figures, as Rank executive and later chairman of the Federation of British Film Makers; Lawrence Weingarten, MGM producer (*A Day at the Races*, *Adam's Rib*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*); George Marshall, prolific American director (*Destry Rides Again*, *The Blue Dahlia*).

MARCH: Sir Arthur Bliss, who wrote the score for *Things to Come*; Carl Wery, German character actor; Harry Lachman, Anglo-American director in the 1930s (*Dante's Inferno*, *They Came By Night*); Paul Verhoeven, German actor and director; Susan Hayward; Charles Spaak, Belgian-born scriptwriter for Feyder, Duvivier, Carné, and most notably Renoir (*Les Bas-Fonds*, *La Kermesse Héroïque*, *La Grande Illusion*); Arthur Crabtree, one-time cameraman who directed competent British thrillers and horrors in the 1940s (*Madonna of the Seven*

Moons); George Stevens, American director (*Quality Street*, *A Place in the Sun*, *Shane*, *Giant*).

APRIL: Mary Ure, British actress, memorable as the downtrodden wife in *Look Back in Anger*; Richard Conte, American actor usually cast as menacing mobster or tough soldier (*Cry of the City*, *Thieves' Highway*); Moe Howard, last of the Three Stooges; Larry Parks, who played Al Jolson twice, was blacklisted, and later worked for Huston in *Freud*; Marjorie Main, hatchet-faced American character actress, best known as Ma Kettle; William Hartnell, tight-lipped sergeant-major in many British war films who became television's first Dr. Who; Fredric March; Gabriello, French character actor, most memorable as Cyprien Dupont in *Partie de Campagne*; Teddy Baird, British producer.

MAY: Philip Dorn, Dutch-born leading man of Forties Hollywood action films; Tony Essex, BBC Television producer of the original *Tonight and The Great War*; Jacques Natanson, French playwright who wrote the screenplays for *Ophuls' La Ronde*, *Le Plaisir* and *Lola Montès*; Michel Simon, Swiss-born actor whose crumpled face and corpulent comic anarchism were perhaps best used by Vigo (*L'Atalante*) and Renoir (*La Chienne*, *Boudu sauvé des Eaux*).

JUNE: Ernest Betts, British film critic and author; Rod Serling, American TV and film scriptwriter (*The Rack*, *Seven Days in May*); Jane Griffiths, British actress (*The Million Pound Note*); Peter Reynolds, British actor who specialised in shiftier young men; Abe Levitow, animator (*Tom and Jerry*) and director (*Mr. Magoo*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*); Ozzie Nelson, American actor and occasional director.

JULY: James Robertson Justice, Scottish character actor, often playing irascible eccentrics; Boris Babotchkin, Russian actor, Vassiliev's *Chapayev*.

AUGUST: Muir Mathieson, musical director of numerous British films; Gustav von Wangenheim, German actor in Lubitsch, Lang and Murnau films; Sidney Buchman, American scriptwriter (*Holiday*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) and producer (*The Group*); Pierre Blaise, young French actor who was Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*; Joseph Kane, director of many Republic Westerns; Cullen Landis, versatile leading man of American silent cinema; Sig Arno, German actor (*Pandora's Box*) who went to Hollywood and was typecast as funny foreigner (*The Great Dictator*, *Up in Arms*).

SEPTEMBER: John McGiver, whose perpetually worried, owl-like features enlivened many Hollywood films (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Love in the Afternoon*); Minta Durfee, American leading lady of silent comedies; Ethel Griffies, British character actress who appeared in many Hollywood films (*Waterloo Bridge*, *Jane Eyre*, *The*



Pierre Fresnay ('*La Grande Illusion*'), Pamela Brown ('*Secret Ceremony*'), John McGiver

Birds); William Thiele, German-born director of early musicals and later Tarzan films; Ian Hunter, stalwart British actor (*The Long Voyage Home*, *Forever and a Day*, *Edward My Son*); Pamela Brown, distinguished actress, often cast in faintly eccentric roles (*I Know Where I'm Going*, *Secret Ceremony*); Clive Morton, British actor who specialised in pompous character parts (*Lawrence of Arabia*, *Carrington V.C.*).

OCTOBER: Mark Frechette, the boy in Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*; Ron Harris, prominent distributor of 16 mm. films.

NOVEMBER: Pier Paolo Pasolini; Robert Herring, film critic for *Close Up* and *The Manchester Guardian* during the 1920s and 1930s; Annette Kellerman, Australian champion swimmer who became a Hollywood silent star as the 'million dollar mermaid' (*Nephtune's Daughter*); Luigi Chiarini, founder of the Centro Sperimentale and controversial director of the Venice Festival during the 1960s; Elspeth Grant, film critic of *The Tatler*; R. C. Sherriff, playwright (*Journey's End*) and screenwriter (*The Invisible Man*, *Lady Hamilton*, *Odd Man Out*).

1975: The Top Ten

AND NOW MY LOVE *** BADLANDS *** A BIGGER SPLASH *** THE CARS THAT ATE PARIS *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** THE LIFE OF OHARU *** SHAMPOO *** STAVISKY... *** THIEVES LIKE US *** THE WIND AND THE LION

—Geoff Brown

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE *** BADLANDS *** THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT *** BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA *** THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER *** INNOCENTS WITH DIRTY HANDS *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** LUCKY LUCIANO *** THE MEAN MACHINE *** STAVISKY...

—Richard Combs

BADLANDS *** BLACK HOLIDAY *** BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA *** CALIFORNIA SPLIT *** DISTANT THUNDER *** THE MATTEI AFFAIR *** THE MEAN MACHINE *** NASHVILLE *** NIGHT MOVES *** THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTE

—Philip French

ALICE IN THE CITIES *** BLACK HOLIDAY *** THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER *** KASEKI *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** THE LIFE OF OHARU *** NASHVILLE *** THE PASSENGER *** THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTE *** STAVISKY...

—John Gillett

BADLANDS *** BLACK HOLIDAY *** DISTANT THUNDER *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** THE MATTEI AFFAIR *** THE PASSENGER *** THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTE *** SMILE *** STAVISKY... *** WINSTANLEY

—Penelope Houston

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE *** BADLANDS *** BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA *** THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** NASHVILLE *** THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTE *** STAVISKY... *** THE WIND AND THE LION *** WINSTANLEY

—Tom Milne

AFTER MANET, AFTER GIORGIONE, LE DEJEUNER SUR L'HERBE, OR FETE CHAMPETRE (Malcolm Legrice) *** ARABIAN NIGHTS *** THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT *** THE FATE OF LEE KHAN *** THE GOALKEEPER'S FEAR OF THE PENALTY *** GOOD MORNING (Ozu) *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** THE LIFE OF OHARU *** THE MATTEI AFFAIR *** NIGHTCLEANERS (Berwick Street Collective)

—Tony Rayns

THE LIFE OF OHARU *** LANCELOT DU LAC *** NASHVILLE *** STAVISKY... *** WINSTANLEY *** GOOD MORNING *** CALIFORNIA SPLIT *** BADLANDS *** BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA *** OCCASIONAL WORK OF A FEMALE SLAVE

—Jonathan Rosenbaum

BEHIND THE RENT STRIKE *** THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT *** BLACK HOLIDAY *** THE MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS *** NIGHT MOVES *** OCCASIONAL WORK OF A FEMALE SLAVE *** THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTE *** A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE *** STAVISKY... *** and from TV: DAYS OF HOPE

—David Wilson

A CONSUMERS/
PRODUCERS
GUIDE-IN-PROGRESS

EDINBURGH ENCOUNTERS

TO
FOUR RECENT
AVANT-GARDE
FILMS

Jonathan Rosenbaum

'The role of a work of art is to plunge people into horror. If the artist has a role, it is to confront people—and himself first of all—with this horror, this feeling that one has when one learns about the death of someone one has loved.'

—Jacques Rivette in an interview, circa 1967.

'For inter-personal communication, [the modernist text] substitutes the idea of collective production; writer and reader are indifferently critics of the text and it is through their collaboration that meanings are collectively produced . . .

The text then becomes the location of thought, rather than the mind. The mind is the factory where thought is at work, rather than the transport system which conveys the finished product. Hence the danger of the myths of clarity and transparency and of the receptive mind; they present thought as pre-packaged, available, given, from the point of view of the consumer . . . Within a modernist text, however, all work is work in progress, the circle is never closed. Incompatible elements in a text should not be ironed out but confronted.'

—Peter Wollen, 'Signs and Meaning in the Cinema' (revised edition), 1972

Are these two statements contradictory or complementary? The former describes art in visceral terms, as mutual emotional devastation; the latter in intellectual terms, as mutually 'indifferent' criticism and production of meaning. But both, in a way, are temperamentally different descriptions of a process that might be regarded as the same. If the first prerequisite of an avant-garde work is that it makes one nervous—disrupting a familiar pattern of consumption, creating a sense of loss or absence which must be filled by the consumer's initiative—the second could be that it somehow rewards productive efforts to come to terms with it.

Since the responsibility for both conditions rests with work and consumer alike, it stands to reason that acceptance without conflict and rejection without compunction are the least productive responses to avant-garde films that can be imagined. Yet broadly speaking, the polarisation today between defenders and detractors is such that no other public stances are readily

acknowledged. To oversimplify somewhat, one faction is play-acting while the other is fleeing in terror.

These stances take the form of two kinds of rhetoric, each of which ignores and alienates the other. 'Inside' critics with the benefit of theoretical contexts and larger funds of background information—some of it gossipy and anecdotal, some of it con-

textual and crucial—usually devote their energies to describing and discussing the text of a work, the concrete elements composing it. 'Outside' critics, often limited by less information and more journalistic constraints, are more concerned with their subjective experiences. Thus the insider fails to address or even acknowledge private experience, leaving the uninitiated out in the cold; the outsider, conversely, makes his own experience public while remaining relatively cavalier about the text, effectively banishing the film itself.

The presumption I have adopted for the present context is that 'avant-garde' can only be defined in relation to the beholder: whether or not it causes enough discomfort to push one forward. If a spectator finds *Wavelength* as easy or as automatic to read as a Western, then he isn't watching an avant-garde film; if he is a film novice encountering a *Sunrise* or a *Citizen Kane* for the first time, he conceivably might be. Any 'reading' (definition, discussion or experience) of a modernist work entails a perpetual dialogue between spectator and text, and I have attempted to bear witness to this process in the formula devised for dealing with the films treated below. All four were screened during the Edinburgh Festival late last August, and I have referred to this context whenever it has seemed relevant.

Feeling myself to occupy a certain middle ground between the vantage points of insider and outsider, producer and consumer, I have made my remarks deliberately confessional and provisional to the point of embarrassment, in an effort to demystify, if I can, some of the more rigid attitudes outlined above. I have been particularly interested in charting some of the means by which my own biases, engagements, disengagements and evaluations have been formed. Limited by single screenings and/or restrictions of space and time, I cannot give these films' texts the kind of close scrutiny that is due to them (which is why I have suggested supplementary texts whenever possible); the same applies to my experiences, all of which are still in progress.

Moses und Aron
(STRAUB, HUILLET)

Expectations: There are probably no filmmakers alive who intimidate me more than the team of Straub and Huillet. I can't believe anyone who describes their works as 'easy to take': easy to consume, perhaps, on a strictly material level—I'm always excited by their use of direct sound, and intrigued by the camera movements which appear to counter this openness, as didactic and final in their effects as Lang's reverse angles. But it's no summer picnic when it comes to reading and co-producing their texts. My usual experience combines an unrigorous respect for what they are doing with a frustrated sense of straggling behind them, which leads me to regard them as utopians aiming their films at 'ideal' spectators who don't yet exist.

It's not merely a matter of following, say, the plots of *Nicht Versöhnt* and *Othon* without prior knowledge of the Böll and Corneille texts which they utilise; I also

have the more immediate problem of assimilating the spoken texts of *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* and *History Lessons* in the time spans allotted me, particularly after the musical performances in the former and the car rides in the latter have slowed my motor impulses down to a more contemplative gait. And turning to Straub/Huillet's interviews, I'm again confronted with nearly equal amounts of admiration and confusion. Clearly they're alive to much of the best in cinema, and their theoretical articulations usually make me feel guilty for not reading more Marx and Engels. But when they proceed to enumerate precise reasons for all that they do, I often find myself split between fascination with these details—as ingenious, autonomous critiques in their own right—and dismay that they seldom correspond to my own readings of the films.

Case in point: at a delightfully good-natured and informative public discussion in Edinburgh, Danièle Huillet parenthetically notes that the sections of black leader punctuating the recitation of Schoenberg's second letter to Kandinsky in *Introduction to the Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* by Anton Schoenberg are introduced to mark elisions in the text. I've seen the short twice, and spent some time pondering the function of those black strips of film: rhythmic, ideological, formal, a kind of distanciation, or merely arbitrary? Some would argue that it doesn't matter; but the strongest impact of any Straub/Huillet film, it seems to me, is that everything matters.

I'm glad to have Huillet's explanation, but I also question the ultimate usefulness of my former blind alleys. Being thrown back on one's habits and resources is valuable if something grows out of the confrontation, but in this case—and comparable ones could be cited in their work—I feel as if I'd been sent out on a singularly unenlightening ride around the block. If, as they frequently state, Huillet/Straub dream of showing their films to factory workers, do they intend to bring along notes explaining such procedures?

Responses to Text: Their film of *Moses und Aron* is my initial encounter with the Schoenberg opera, and from the moment the music begins I am grateful for having had this innocence. For the first time in any film, I have the sensation of listening to a piece of music without any kind of interference. This isn't true in the Bach film, which obliges one to watch musicians performing in an overall context of 'work'. Here we see the singers performing live and, along with them, hear the offscreen pre-recorded orchestra (facts I heard about before the screening), and in no way do the pans or cuts or actors' movements contrive to interpret the music (although they do interpret the libretto). Furthermore, natural sounds of footsteps, breathing and other movements are so beautifully captured along with the music that I know in advance that Gielen's separate recording of the opera will always sound somewhat incomplete, at least as a soundtrack score. This is the anti-*Fantasia* par excellence; and long before the film arrives at the Golden Calf in Act II, it becomes clear that this is an anti-DeMille approach to spectacle as well.



Above and below: 'Moses und Aron'

But a question presents itself about the revels staged around this calf. If Moses represents Idea and Aron stands for Image, one might suppose that their conflict would become most intense when Desire rears its orgiastic head. Elsewhere, the voices of the burning bush have been kept offscreen so that (as Straub later explains), after the camera is panning up from Moses and across the landscape, these voices will subsequently seem to be those of 'The People', who appear two scenes later as the chorus—a subversive turnaround of the material indeed. The miracle of the staff becoming a snake has been similarly transformed by cutting from one to the other rather than resorting to any trickery, while the Pillar of Fire becomes the sudden increase in light over a landscape brought about by a passing cloud. But when we get to the orgy, images of desire, passion and bloodshed are so radically stripped of potential resonance that it seems the Calf's temptations aren't even getting a decent

look-in. On the other hand, this is where I find the music most exciting and expressive, which makes me reconsider these tactics. Accompanying the musical fury with nude bodies, dancing and violence that in no way compete with or duplicate any of its power may be the best possible way of serving it; who else in cinema would have really left Schoenberg's music alone?

Act III—spoken by Moses and Aron, without music—is striking but enigmatic. Filmed in one take, it begins with Aron at the feet of Moses and two soldiers in long shot, a towering vista of mountain and lake behind them, and ends with Moses in close-up.

Afterthoughts: Immediately after the screening, I'm told that according to Schoenberg's instructions, Aron is supposed to drop dead after Moses sets him free. Straub 'explains' this later in the public discussion by noting that at the end of the film Moses and Aron have destroyed one another ('They are



simply two aspects of the same thing') and only *The People* are left—a fact I can accept and understand ideologically but not materially, because the film doesn't end that way.

In many respects, my work on the film has scarcely begun. Buying the recording and listening to it with the libretto in German and English, seeing the film again in Paris and taking notes, matching these notes with both the libretto and a copy of the script in German, have all been enlightening projects. One cannot appreciate a great deal of the film properly unless one has read Schoenberg's stage directions and then seen how they have or haven't been followed. When, for example, it is indicated that 'From the audience Moses and Aron . . . appear to change their respective positions'—with Moses shifting from foreground to background to foreground, and Aron vice versa—this transition is effected by one elaborate camera movement. Like many other details, it makes me think that Straub/Huillet aren't so much 'minimalists' (as they're often called) as 'essentialists' . . . Whatever my qualms about their stimulating statements regarding what *should* be evident in the film (and isn't), the deeper that I delve into its textures, the richer it becomes.

Suggested: Interview with Straub and Huillet (*Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 258-9), script of *Moses und Aron* (*Filmkritik* 5/6/75), Michael Gielen's recording of the opera (with libretto) on Phillips.

Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen
(MICHAEL SNOW)

Expectations: Even though a New York friend warned me some months ago that this nearly five-hour film doesn't have the seductive qualities of Snow's earlier work, there's nothing at Edinburgh that I'm more curious or anxious to see. Speaking of 'seduction' in relation to *Wavelength*, *Back and Forth* and *The Central Region* may raise some smiles among those readers who shun them like the bubonic plague—a group that may well constitute the majority. But seductive, provocative, challenging, eye-opening and mind-bending they certainly are, if only one can profitably get past the point of realising that Snow has brought possibilities and points of reference to cinema that it never had before.

Large claims, to be sure; yet the beauty and terror of Snow's films are both essential functions of this uniqueness. The route of a *cinéophile* into the work of Godard, Rivette and Straub is largely predicated on the experience and knowledge these men have of film history—informed by a history of taste, one might add, which is basically common to all three. For me, Straub's claim to interest is immediately enhanced by his enthusiasm for Renoir's *La Nuit du Carrefour* and Mizoguchi, his appreciations of Griffith and Ford. By contrast—and speaking still from a limited *cinéophile* viewpoint—Snow's films effectively come out of nowhere and 'refer back' to nothing. And because his formation largely *can* be traced back through his work in painting and sculpture (along with his career as a free-jazz musician and his work in animation for

TV commercials with George Dunning, Richard Williams and others), certain art journals have shown more interest in him than most film magazines.

Snow's three earlier features are based on the consequences of inexorable camera movements: a gradual zoom across an 80-foot loft; horizontal (and eventually vertical) pans swivelling 'back and forth' across parts of a classroom; 360-degree rotations of a camera scanning a spectacular vista of sky, rocks and mountains. The challenge in each case is to determine just what one is to *do* in relation to these relentless trajectories. Adventures and lessons in the potentialities of perception, their liberating power is to reveal that there is much more to do—to see, grasp and come to terms with—than one initially supposes.

The progress of the zoom in *Wavelength*, punctuated by fragments of an implied storyline (including a mysterious death and its later discovery) and informed by a sense

subsidiary role in these films—duplicating in some mechanical rhythmic fashion the operations of the camera and/or supplementing the presence of people 'realistically'—Snow's new work is said to be devoted to relationships between sound and image.

Responses to Text: And so it is. Over 285 minutes and 24 sections of varying lengths separated by flashes of colours, *Rameau's Nephew* focuses its attention on little else. And that, indeed, is what I find most disconcerting—a sense of reductiveness in relation to the preceding films. In one respect, Snow's estrangement from the 'dominant' film tradition makes itself felt negatively here. In the Edinburgh festival booklet, he refers to 'image-sound relationships in the cinema' as a 'fabulous practically uncharted artistic area.' Practically uncharted indeed, if one excludes Bresson, Dovzhenko, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Godard, Hanoun, Mizoguchi, Ozu, Pollet, Porta-



'Rameau's Nephew by Diderot': section twelve

of finite destination (the opposite wall), entails a mixture of narrative suspense and a more 'painterly' response to shifting aspects of light, colour, texture and visual field. *Back and Forth* turns most of its potential narrative elements (the intermittent presence and activity of people) into painterly subjects while sending its inanimate objects into paroxysms of movement (as in one rapid section, where the accelerated scannings of a row of windows appear successive rather than adjacent, like flickering movie frames). Continuous movement and a total lack of human presence in *The Central Region* establishes tensions between a gradually unfolding 'landscape painting' and the kinetic sensation of losing one's centre of gravity in an experience roughly akin to riding a demonic ferris wheel. In each film, one can either 'follow' the camera movement or work out one's own looking/seeing/staring/gazing patterns in opposition to it: either procedure leads to a different set of problems, and throughout one is participating in a dialectic which illuminates at every stage.

Although sound usually plays only a

bella, Pudovkin, Renoir, Resnais, Rivette, Sternberg, Straub, Tati and Welles, among others.

To be fair, he isn't pursuing this concern in a narrative context, which does make for substantial differences. But the seemingly arbitrary order of most sections leads me to regard them more as an interrelated collection of shorts than as a sustained experience, which raises the question of why one has to take it all in one serving . . . Space limitations make it impossible to describe every section, so I'll restrict myself to the rudiments of a few which seem most amusing or interesting:

No. 4, the credit sequence: superimposed over a passing train, a long succession of names drifts upward while a stammering voice reads them off, occasionally corrected by Snow's voice when the pronunciation is wrong. We get title, dedication (to Alexander Graham Bell) and a 'cast' of over 150 names, some quite nonsensical (Lemon Coca Wish, Nice Slow Ham, Malice Shown, Show Me a Ling); meanwhile, one's attention playfully stammers between following the spoken words and those on the screen as

they go in and out of synch with one another.

7, a long sequence inside an airplane, comes closest to resembling earlier Snow by following disconnected phrases spoken by various people with fast pans away from them, separated by jump cuts; this one, too, keeps you on your toes. The verbiage is a mixture of clichés, puns, jokes, statements about language, nonsense ('Vivaldi was a big influence on Johann Sebastian Fuck'); finally, moving back in time, one hears Snow offscreen instructing each person on what to say.

8 shows two hands beating the sides of a sink like bongos, continuing as it is filled with water and then emptied. The sound is so close to that of bongos that I wonder if dubbing is involved; if so, it's a skilful job indeed, and the bongo playing isn't bad either.

12 has the camera zooming away from another camera to reveal a group of people sitting around it, babbling incomprehensibly (tape manipulations?); eventually the image is reversed and the shot is run backward, the dialogue now becoming only semi-incomprehensible (something about a bad smell).

16, a delightful bit, juxtaposes the rearrangement by hand of numerous objects on a desk (including a copy of *Rameau's Nephew* in Penguin) with a voice describing these actions: again, like 4, a dance of variations as the one gradually strays behind or ahead of the other.

19, wordless, shows Joyce Wieland (Snow's wife) at the window of a cabin. A loud noise sounding (to me) rather like a wheelbarrow pushed over gravel starts up, and one becomes aware of a sheet of glass in front of the window that is now becoming streaked and obscured by raindrops. Is it in fact rain that one hears? An interesting demonstration of relative surfaces, and sight helping to identify sound.

Among the games played in other sections are multiple superimpositions of sound and image, recited texts from various sources (including Mao), a disembodied voice in an office, certain words of dialogue replaced by guitar strums followed by images of guitar strums shown silent, syllables synchronised with strokes of a violin, and a wonderful *Muriel*-like mosaic of shots accompanying the successive syllables of a story being recited (too bad I can't follow the story as well). A jokey leitmotif recurring throughout the film—critic P. Adams Sitney holds forth on it in section 22—is that each time the words 4, four, for or fore occur visually or aurally, a separate shot acknowledges the total of these appearances to date.

As the reference in the title to Diderot suggests, Snow's aspiration appears to be encyclopaedic. In parts, I find it intriguing; in toto, indigestible. Encyclopaedias are useful things to have around, but who wants to plough through from A to Z in a single sitting?

Afterthoughts: I speak with Snow after the screening, and he clarifies a number of points: 8 and 19 are indeed sequences in synch sound, and a central point of the former is the synch/sink pun, which eluded me. The first half of 12 has the dialogue played backwards, while the second takes the dialogue spoken *phonetically* backwards and reverses that . . . Peter Wollen observes that the nonsensical 'cast' names—40 by my

count—are all anagrams of 'Michael Snow', as is Wilma Schoen in the title. (Dennis Young, on the contrary, is alive and living in Canada, and Snow speaks of adding another shot to the film to prove that he exists; nobody I ask seems to know who he is.) Simon Field recalls his experience in helping to shoot part of sequence 10; Laura Mulvey points out that one of the texts in 21 comes from *Pride and Prejudice*; James Pettifer objects to the depoliticised use of a Mao text in the same sequence; Ben Brewster comments favourably on the film's looseness, which he compares to concerts of the music of Cornelius Cardew; Tony Rayns argues that section 21 largely explains and justifies the rest of the film. Such swapping sessions are partially what makes a festival like Edinburgh so useful; certainly they can help one map out the coherence of certain films after the fact.

What still rattles me about *Rameau's Nephew* is not having enough information about certain technical procedures either before or after the screening to appreciate (or identify) what Snow is doing in certain cases. And the perceptual investigation it offers is finally less stimulating than what his earlier work explores. Snow calls it a 'musical comedy', and perhaps I approached it with the wrong attitude. The shifting strategies turn much of it into a series of teasing puzzles, but beyond a certain point one can lose interest in solving them; and the implied play between sound and colour never adds up to *anything* substantial that I can discern. While the earlier features demand to be consumed and produced whole, wasting nothing, it seems that certain sequences here, once one isolates their basic concepts, leave a lot of dead matter behind—like eggshells and orange peel in the wake of a picnic.

Suggested: Programme notes by Margie Keller for the screening at Film Center, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, May 30, 1975 (including a detailed *précis*).

Speaking Directly: Some American Notes (JON JOST)

Expectations: Virtually none.

Responses to Text: From the moment Jost traces an animated fish in the air with his finger, I suspect I may be in for some surprises, and prove to be right as well as wrong. As a very personal self-presentation, the film frequently runs me through exercises that I recall from fictional and non-fictional counterparts: Godard in the late Sixties, Jim McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* and *My Girlfriend's Wedding*, Jonas Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. But Jost is so distinct a presence that I gradually start to accept his exercises—didactic section titles like 'I-They' and 'I-You', 'A Geography (Here)' and 'A Geography (There)'; voice-over identifications of people and places; detailed inventories of the film's financing and equipment—as means rather than ends, and my focus turns increasingly towards the subjects at hand: Jost himself, the film he is making. And before long it becomes apparent that he is going about his business with a rare sort of honesty, a directness of address that

makes even Godard himself seem like an illusionist.

At the same time, I'm wary about the lure that can be exerted by this brand of all-American confessional—the note of cranky individualism which dictates that all the most well-worn discoveries have to be reasserted anew, like home-made appliances, as if no one had ever thought of them before. It's the precise reverse of that assumed tradition of several centuries, languages and ideologies lurking behind every gesture which I find in Straub/Huillet. An American and a contemporary of Jost, I'm constantly tempted to indulge in this rhetoric—what else am I doing now?—which may give me a high tolerance for it, extended further by a familiarity with the lifestyles and idioms. It's quite different in this way from the urban, apolitical stance of Yvonne Rainer's films*—although there, too, my enjoyment is partially dictated by a prolonged exposure to self-analytical New York voices and idioms, which often make her films sound like cooler, more intellectual versions of Woody Allen and Elaine May.

So Jost's painstaking expositions of his life, his cabin in rural Oregon, friends, acquaintances, daily habits, feelings, auto-critiques and political convictions remind me of other lives I know, and a sensibility that stretches all the way back to Thoreau by way of Mailer and Agee that seeks to justify and bear witness to all the concrete matters at hand, the speaker first of all. But no sooner have I flashed on Thoreau after Jost has begun describing his rustic home—and gotten ready to dismiss his naïve pretensions—than Jost takes up this very issue himself, and proceeds to explore its ramifications in some detail.

This sort of thing happens more than once, and can lead to irritation as well as respect. The combination of thoughtful earnestness and analytical rectitude imposes itself as a personality as much as a sensibility, making it quite difficult to judge film and film-maker separately. An especially thorny instance occurs in a section devoted to Elayne, the woman he lives with, when one hears her attempts at self-expression doomed from the start by the fact that *he* is dictating the context. Instructed that she has to speak about herself in relation to him for the purposes of the film, she finally reverts to the text he has already prepared for her, and the effect could hardly be more devastating. Should I admire Jost for letting the distastefulness of this episode stand intact, or recoil from the fact that he perpetrates it in the first place? I wind up doing a bit of both, which effectively means liking the film more and Jost less.

By the same token, I'm delighted when in another section someone named Dennis lodges a vitriolic protest against the film as a form of self-indulgence, urging the audience (me) to burn the print I'm watching or at least to leave the cinema, finally declaring that he intends to do just that on *his* side of the camera, by leaving the frame—which he promptly does. The paradox is

* Due to lack of space as well as confidence for dealing with Rainer's *Lives of Performers and Film about a woman who . . .* adequately here, after seeing them in less than ideal circumstances, I have regretfully excluded these very interesting films from this survey.

that I'm delighted but *don't* leave the cinema. Is Dennis being self-indulgent as well? Am I?

To Jost's credit, he seems to have much more political sophistication than most of his peers—largely, I think, because as with everything else he tackles in this film, he takes very little for granted. Unlike a lot of Marxist rhetoric I encounter in and about cinema on both sides of the Atlantic, Jost's political stances appear to have nothing to do with social, professional or academic conformity, self-flattery or coquetry, and most of his analyses teach me something.

Afterthoughts: Why then don't I recount these lessons in some detail? The extent of Jost's anti-illusionism prompts me to attempt a little of my own, helping me to appreciate how hard it is to get rid of artifice. In fact, I don't recall most of his political sequences with any precision; what I mainly remember is that I was impressed at the time. My notes allude to one about Vietnam composed of an endlessly repeated film loop of American bombing accompanied by a woman's personal testimony about tortures, heard simultaneously with a man reciting facts and figures about the U.S. involvement—none of which, I should add, taught me anything essential that I hadn't already known. (I recognise the intention of revealing the war's televised monotony and remoteness, but that's nothing new either.) I also recorded some statistics that are cited elsewhere, that the U.S. comprises 7 per cent of the world's land, 5 per cent of its population, and consumes 60 per cent of its material resources. Perhaps I'd heard *this* before, too, but Jost nevertheless places it in a context where its meaning is renewed for me.

I've neglected to mention several crucial episodes, including a long sequence showing only a stop-watch on the top of a blank white frame, before a hand enters to remove it (rather like a call to silent prayer in a religious service, but I like it anyway); and various striking visual tropes, such as a very slow dissolve that shows the sun appearing in an egg yolk. As some of my selective inventory may suggest, Jost has included a little of everything to flesh out his statement; what I haven't tried to convey, however, is the rather precise way he has structured it all. What I like most about the film is the way it lives up to its title and addresses me in the act of watching it, and not in some imaginary netherworld outside this experience.

Suggested: Articles by Julia Lesage and Jon Jost in *Jump Cut* No. 5, January–February 1975.

**Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce—
1080 Bruxelles
(CHANTAL AKERMAN)**

Expectations: Acquaintances who've seen this unsubtitled Belgian film at Cannes or Berlin describe it with some bemusement as a film over three hours long* showing Delphine Seyrig, as the title heroine, doing a lot of mundane things like polishing shoes and washing dishes. The festival booklet notes that she kills a man 'unpremeditatedly' towards the end, and that the film covers a

time span of two days. Akerman has made other films, but at this point I know nothing about them, apart from the fact that she has some reputation as a feminist.

Responses to Text: Seyrig/Dielman dries dishes, adds salt to potatoes on the stove. After she greets an old man at the door of her flat, takes his coat and scarf, and goes off into another room with him, there's an ellipsis—here, as elsewhere, covered by a straight cut. They emerge, he hands her some money ('Alors, la semaine prochaine') and leaves. She puts the money in a ceramic pot on the dining room table, returns to the kitchen, pours out the boiling water, transfers the potatoes to another pot; takes a towel off her bed and drops it in a hamper, closes a bedroom window, turns out the light. Another ellipsis: she finishes taking a bath, dries and dresses herself, cleans the tub, sets the dining room table. A boy of sixteen or so arrives; she kisses him on the

remarks drily that making love with him had no importance for her apart from having a child. She goes to bed—ellipsis—gets out of bed, brings him fresh underwear, polishes his shoes, grinds coffee beans, etc., serves him breakfast, ties his scarf, gives him money from the pot in the dining room, sees him off. Folds up the sofa-bed, washes cutlery and dishes.

By now, I've used up less than a quarter of my abbreviated notes, but there's no need to extend the rundown indefinitely. It all proceeds at the same naturalistic crawl in sharp, uninflected colour (shot by Babette Mangolte), with characters always shown frontally, from behind or in profile but never in intermediate angles, and no camera movements that I can recall.

I'm neither bored (exactly) nor interested (exactly), just curious. I tend to like movies that allow me breathing space in which to think, but this one gives me so much freedom that I don't know what to do with



'Jeanne Dielman': Delphine Seyrig

cheek, serves him soup; he reads while eating until she asks him not to. (A neon sign flashes from outside in the small adjoining living room.) She returns to the kitchen to fetch meat and potatoes, turns off the kitchen light, serves the food. 'C'est bon?' 'Oui, oui,' he mutters, dawdling over the food. She chides him for not eating more, removes his half-eaten plate, then takes out a letter from a friend or relative and reads it aloud, very mechanically. She gives him chewing gum... corrects his pronunciation while he reads Baudelaire's 'L'Ennemi' twice (significant? I doubt it)... turns on the radio... knits.

She and her son go out, take the lift down to street level, leave the building. Ellipsis; they return, take the lift back up again. She makes up his sofa-bed in the living room and they talk about her dead husband (his father); in response to questions, she

it—one reason, perhaps, why I take so many notes... The film continues to chronicle the remainder of the second day: a trip to a post office and shoe repair; she runs into a friend who invites her for coffee but she says she doesn't have time, maybe next week. Comes home with groceries, writes a letter, takes charge of a neighbour's baby while preparing wiener schnitzel, puts on make-up, goes out and buys yarn, drinks coffee alone in a café, returns home. Is drying her hands in the kitchen when the doorbell rings; greets another male customer—this one Jacques Doniol Valcroze!—and continues through much the same patterns as the previous day.

At one point I leave the cinema for a few minutes—partially for a cigarette and partially to see what it feels like *not* watching the movie—and when I return, I don't feel as if I've missed anything important. Yet something keeps me watching, although I'm not sure precisely what. I know that some of it is Seyrig's performance—probably her best since *Muriel*—which is remarkable for conveying almost no psychological nuances whatever; apart from her very precise

* The film's running time has been listed variously as 195, 210 and 225 minutes: it appears that half an hour was edited out, apparently by the director, between its showings at Cannes last May and its single screening in Edinburgh.

movements and rituals, all perfectly executed, it is virtually impossible to guess what she's thinking at any given moment. As with Bresson, this makes her movements more interesting rather than less, but no sort of spiritual project is implied. Indeed, what baffles me about the movie is its absolute *lack* of resonance. What could Akerman possibly have in mind but a *reductio ad absurdum* of neo-realism? It doesn't even qualify as polemic because the facts are too uninflected and ordinary.

Or are they? Is it 'ordinary' that this archetypal bourgeois workhorse squeezes a prostitute's career so discreetly and unobtrusively into her daily routine? And can I believe, even in advance, that this woman could commit an unpremeditated murder?

Anticipating the latter event, I notice that by the third day, little cracks in her timetable and behaviour have already started to appear. In the kitchen, she pauses uncharacteristically over a plate, and even

on the towel laid out on the bed while her face remains expressionless, gradually showing some semblance of emotion as she reaches orgasm. She gets dressed; in the mirror behind her the man, smiling contentedly, is still visible on the bed. She picks up a pair of scissors, walks to the other side of the bed, and stabs him in the neck. Ellipsis; we find her seated at the dining room table, blood on her hands. She sits thinking for about five minutes while the neon sign flashes from outside: it is the last shot of the film, and probably the longest. At last, I think, she—and I—have something to think about.

Afterthoughts: Of all the major films I saw in Edinburgh, *Jeanne Dielman* had the least to offer me immediately, while watching it, and perhaps the most to offer me eventually, recalling it afterwards. In a slow, cumulative way, everything about it becomes interesting, and the apparent simplicity of 'con-

watching for the preceding three hours. (I spoke briefly with a friend of Akerman's at Edinburgh who suggested that the murder was not introduced for any psychological reasons, but simply as a means for ending the film.) By breaking decisively with a naturalistic mode, Akerman throws considerable doubt on the apparent naturalism leading up to it. How 'realistic' is the film, after all? From moment to moment it creates the illusion of showing us 'everything', but it obviously doesn't; the film's running time is roughly one-sixteenth of the time span it covers, and even if we omit two nights of sleep we still have thirty-odd hours unaccounted for.

The film's paradoxical fascination is that it's both naturalistic and non-naturalistic; everything is a clue and nothing offers a solution. Retracing the narrative's itinerary, one finds a startling demonstration of just how much mundane work is required merely to keep the bourgeois world of Jeanne Dielman intact and static, and how slight and imperceptible the ingredients are that might throw this system out of order. An easy conclusion would treat her as a simple social victim *à la* Fassbinder, her act of violence as spontaneous rebellion. But rebellion against whom or what? What we see in the film appears to be self-imposed, a way of life that seems partially designed to rule out the possibility of extended thinking. And if practically all her activity is directly or indirectly in the service of men—her customers and son—the only sort of affection she offers to either looks as mechanical and unspontaneous as her other duties.

With the ceramic pot in the dining room serving as economic index to her existence on Quai de Commerce, the rituals sustaining this cash flow could hardly be more universal; why, then, should the film be 'difficult' to watch? Clearly it needs its running time, for its subject is an epic one, and the overall sweep of two days allows one to observe the patterns and their variations, trains one to recognise and respond to fluctuations and nuances. If a radical cinema is something that goes to the roots of experience, this is at the very least a film that shows where and how some of these roots are buried.

By focusing so exclusively on a part and aspect of life that art generally omits, abbreviates, idealises, takes for granted or refines out of existence, Akerman enables one to contemplate and analyse its repetitions, interrelations and consequences—above all, its centrality—allowing one a great deal of leeway in what one finds while obliging one to come to terms with the implications. Politically, it functions like a bomb with a nearly interminable fuse, but the explosion it eventually effects is not so much a murder on the screen as a fission in the mind. Within the limits of the world we see, the heroine's work is not merely what makes everything else 'possible'; one could just as concretely define it as what makes everything else impossible—a prison as much as a refuge, a safety catch as well as a trigger. To what extent is Jeanne Dielman a consumer, and to what extent a producer? And if, shifting the argument, we should conclude that she is *being* consumed and *being* produced, who is performing these tasks but the film-makers, in collaboration with ourselves?



'... a part and aspect of life that art generally omits ...'

drops a spoon—quite a dramatic moment. Outside, she seems disconcerted about the post office and certain shops being closed for lunch; back in her bedroom, she looks at a clock: is her schedule breaking down? Last night, she fell behind in cooking the vegetables, and made two restless stabs at writing a letter before giving up and reading the paper instead. What's bugging her?

After preparing meat in the kitchen, she pours herself a cup of coffee and seems to find something wrong with it. She actually sits in a chair and *thinks* at one point; and after going downstairs to check her mailbox (nothing there), she sits again and thinks for about two minutes more. She has trouble when the neighbour leaves her baby—can't stop it from crying, can't decide whether to play with it or not. She goes out twice looking for a kind of button that she's told is no longer available, and finds a package containing a nightgown when she returns the second time.

The third male customer arrives, and this time we cut to her bedroom. She unbuttons her blouse beside a mirror; we hear a cough offscreen. Then we see him make love to her

tent' and manner is deceptive. I've spent hours discussing the film with friends, and countless details that initially seemed mechanical or inconsequential have assumed interest and meaning retrospectively. The fact that Akerman seems to have kept resolutely silent about the film is undoubtedly for the best, because any precise definitions of intention could inhibit the viewer and reduce the film's possibilities. Strictly illusionistic from first frame to last, it none the less demonstrates, like Dreyer's *Gertrud*, just how subversive such a mode can still be.

Does Dielman commit murder in the penultimate shot because she has just had an orgasm (possibly for the first time), or because the customer doesn't get dressed right away (thus further jeopardising her household schedule), or because she hasn't been able to find the kind of button she wants, or because of some radical feminist awakening? That the film doesn't allow us to say is wholly to its credit; if any reasons were supplied, I think the act would be still harder to accept, simply because it is not an act performed by the woman we have been

U.S. TV

THE GREAT SPIN-OFF

James Monaco

Fifteen years ago, when he was chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, a man named Newton Minow gained a certain degree of notoriety when he labelled American television 'a vast wasteland'. The phrase stuck. Even now, three television generations later, the 'wasteland' is the metaphor of choice for most critics of the entertainment and information medium at the centre of American life. Yet Minow's characterisation is not a very useful definition: it condemns but it doesn't explain. More informative, I think, to describe American TV not in terms of land but water, as rather a vast, wine-dark sea of images and sounds which sometimes frightens because of its apparent sameness but which, when examined more closely, reveals certain currents and eddies, occasional contradictory rip-tides and—once in a great while—phenomena like waterspouts or tsunamis. Like the real sea, the TV sea has its laws. What follows is an attempt to describe the basic 'oceanography' of American entertainment television as it revealed itself in 1975.

It's a good time to take a reading of the medium, since it is about to undergo the most significant structural changes since its birth more than twenty-five years ago. In the late 1970s, new methods of transmission—cable and satellite—are going to expand access to the medium. The great age of the networks is nearing an end, and although their product of the mid-seventies may not be their best work, it should be remembered as the highest refinement of the network system.

There are 82 television channels available in each broadcast area in the United States. For various technical reasons, however, less than half of these are viable. Only 12 of the 82 are the powerful VHF stations; the other 70, operating on a different radio frequency band (UHF) are considerably weaker and therefore marginal operations at present. Only seven of the 12 VHF channels are in operation in any one area (and in most areas outside the major urban centres, far fewer), a fact which has allowed the three commercial networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC, in descending order of importance—to dominate the airwaves since 1948. The success of cable transmission systems (rather than broadcast), which has been predicted for many years but which is just now happening as the result of a conjunction of technical innovations, is eventually going to open up all 82 of the potential channels, and offers the possibility of dozens more should the need arise. The single controlling factor in the development of television has been the strict limitation of access. Unlike magazines, books, movies, even radio (where the number of stations is potentially but not effectively limited), the medium of television must operate within strict boundaries. Anyone can start a magazine; anyone can make a film; not so with television. And a television programme director has only 168 hours at his disposal each week.

The second important fact of the network set-up is that most individual broadcast stations are owned and operated not by the networks but by individual companies. (Each of the networks does own a handful of stations in the major markets—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.) In the past, the network affiliates have stuck fairly close to the network schedule; it was the most effective and often the cheapest source of programming. But several developments in the last few years have begun to loosen the networks' grip on the affiliates. The Prime Time Access Rule of the early 1970s was instituted by the F.C.C. in order to guarantee local stations a certain amount of 'free' time during the prime hours, 7 to 11 p.m. The intention was good, but Prime Time Access backfired when local stations,

instead of producing their own programming for the hour each evening that was set aside for them, resorted *en masse* to syndicated game shows sold by independent producers, the cheapest and—most critics agree—the lowest form of programming.

Nevertheless, two independent developments in the last few months indicate that the local affiliates might become much more independent of the networks in the near future. *Space 1999*, produced by ITV and syndicated in America outside the network system, has had considerable success knocking network shows out of affiliate schedules, proving that non-network producers can break the pattern if they can offer shows of network calibre. Second, and more important, a major supplier of product to the networks, Norman Lear (*All in the Family*, *Maude*, *Sanford and Son*) recently worked outside the network system to sell a show directly to the local stations. If he is successful, the 'middleman' networks might in the near future find themselves in direct competition with their suppliers.

These developments can't help but lessen the extraordinary power the networks have held for twenty-five years. But at the moment the game is still played by their rules, which we had better examine before discussing the patterns of programming that emerge from them.

Because of the inherent limitations of time and channels, the three commercial networks have effective control over the airwaves and can do with them as they will, hampered only by an occasional F.C.C. ruling. Network programming begins at seven a.m. each day and lasts, with occasional breaks for local shows, until one or two a.m. the next morning. No local station is legally required to broadcast the network's programme at all time, but obviously stations which are too independent stand a good chance of losing their profitable affiliations. In the 1950s the networks produced most of their programming themselves, often in conjunction with sponsors (and advertising agencies) to whom they had sold an entire time block. But since the early 1960s they have limited themselves to

producing news and sports, special events and much of the daytime programming, and relied on 'independent' producers to supply nearly all the programming used during the prime time evening hours. As a rule, they no longer sell blocks of time or whole shows to single advertisers, having found it more profitable to market the 13 or 14 per cent of each hour reserved for advertising in small pieces, ranging from 10 to 120 seconds. The price of this time is now nearly \$120,000 per minute on the most popular shows, so that a network's gross revenue for one prime time evening schedule could conceivably reach \$3 or \$4 million.

The price the network can get for advertising time depends on the show's popularity as measured by ratings (the famous 'Neilsens'), so that the networks are not really selling time so much as they are marketing a particular audience. Like magazines, they recognised in the 1960s that the gross size of the audience was not so important to most advertisers as its quality. 'Demographics' is the word that is used. The result has been a shift from programming in the early 1960s devoted to 'Middle America'—middle-aged, middle-class viewers in large towns and rural areas—to programming in the 1970s directed at a younger, more urban, 'upscale' audience with more money to spend. Nevertheless, the Nielsen ratings are so important that although NBC lost out to CBS (for the nineteenth year in a row) by less than one Nielsen point during the 1974-75 season, that slight difference was worth \$17.5 million to the winner. (ABC is a perennial also ran, having thirty fewer affiliates than the two more powerful networks.)

The networks produce their own news and public affairs programmes mainly for the prestige it affords them; they produce their own highly profitable sports programming as well (and late evening and early morning talk shows, maybe the quintessential form of American television), but they rely on outside producers for the bulk of their all-important prime-time programming. Only one of the 75 network prime-time programmes was produced by the network itself this season. The producers approach the programming executives with ideas or outlines for a show. If the executive thinks the show might have a chance, he approves expenses for the writing of a few scripts and the making of a pilot (which is often recycled as a special, or theatrical film). The pilot is tested with small audiences in preview theatres (and increasingly via cable). But its success in the tests doesn't in any way guarantee it a spot in the schedule, for the real art of network television lies in the complex game of scheduling that takes place late each winter. It is not the gross popularity of a show that matters so much as its share of the audience watching television during its time period. If both ABC and CBS have scheduled comedies for 8 p.m. Wednesday, for example, NBC might just squeak through to win the period by counter-programming with an action show. In addition, a strong show has great potential as a 'lead-in' (or, less frequently, as a 'lead-out') to a programme that needs a boost, since television dials tend to follow Newton's laws of inertia. The history of recent TV is littered



Spin-offs: Redd Foxx and Miriam Colon in 'Sanford and Son'; Jean Stapleton and Carroll O'Connor in 'All in the Family'

with perfectly acceptable programmes, some of high quality, which were squeezed out by programming decisions totally unrelated to the value of the shows.

It follows that the structure of network television is unlike the structures of the entertainment and information media that have preceded it. Networks don't sell entertainment, as the Hollywood studios did; they sell audiences, and the size and quality of those audiences depend almost as much on the talent and luck of the programming executive in placing shows effectively as they do on the inherent value of the shows. The programmer wants a show to fit the 'sound' or 'look' he is trying to create. People don't specifically watch a programme so much as they relax in it, absorb it, bathe in the general ambience of the television sea. The result is that elements of a show are more significant than the show as a whole. The focus of critical attention is the family of programmes, each group identified by a particular style or rhythm, an attitude to character, a specific subtext or a type of pay-off.

As television history has progressed, this process of grouping series has become more and more sophisticated. We could crudely define several periods of TV history this way: the late 1940s and early 1950s are best remembered for the variety series, as the new medium quickly consumed large

amounts of ageing vaudeville talent. This was the era of Ed Sullivan, Milton Berle and (a little later) Sid Caesar. The late 1950s are remembered for live, non-serial dramas (Playhouse 90, Studio One, Philco Playhouse) and generally regarded as the 'Golden Age' of television (although I find the stagey pretensions of these individualised dramas directly counter-productive). It was not until the early 1960s, with the advent of videotape and, more important, the switch away from network production to production by outside companies (many of them subsidiaries of the Hollywood studios), that American television settled down to the mix of half-hour comedy and hour-long action/drama series that we recognise today as its basic forms. There had of course been programmes like these since the early 1950s—Jack Webb's *Dragnet* and Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz' *I Love Lucy* were seminal—but in the Fifties the best television was usually seen to be a matter of live variety or live, individual drama.

Just as many of the best Hollywood films were made in the 1930s, before people knew they were inventing genres that would last for thirty years, so much of the best American television dates from the early 1960s, when the patterns which were later to become highly stylised and defined were first being established. Generally, the action/drama shows organised themselves according to professions. (The influence of Jack Webb should not be disregarded here.) Police and detective genres were action oriented (as were most Westerns); doctor, lawyer, teacher and other profession shows (social workers and politicians were both represented) were more idea oriented. The best of the profession programmes, by far, were those produced in New York, often by Herbert Brodtkin, in the early Sixties—such shows as *The Defenders* (E. G. Marshall and Robert Reed as lawyers) and *East Side, West Side* (George C. Scott and Cicely Tyson as social workers). As opposed to the majority of programmes produced in Los Angeles, the New York shows were more successful on every count. They were far more likely to use location settings; they were more tightly written, with grittier characterisations and more irony; and they could avail themselves of the large pool of acting talent in New York, while the Hollywood shows had nothing to draw on except starlets of both sexes.

But as the 1960s wore on, and the movie studio subsidiaries began to exert more influence, New York television production dried up. Only one prime-time show in the 1975 schedules was made in New York—*Beacon Hill*, which is an anomaly for other reasons as well. In the late Sixties American television settled into a dull rut. When the 'renaissance' of the 1970s came, it was expressed in comic terms rather than dramatic. To describe the situation of TV comedy in the early Sixties I only have to name its most successful show of those years: *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The comedy advance was prefigured in 1968 with *Laugh-In*, a kind of American version of the British tradition that stretches from *The Goon Show* to *Monty Python*. But *Laugh-In* burned out quickly (as did the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*—which was brilliant television—for other reasons), and the real

progress in topical, realistic comedy had to wait for the advent in 1970 of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *All in the Family*, two shows which together are now responsible for between 12 and 15 spin-offs and imitations on the network schedules. (In 1972 came *M.A.S.H.*, the third important comedy series of the Seventies, which, curiously, hasn't yet developed a spin-off family.)

Since the 1950s (the great days of George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Jack Benny) these half-hour comedies have been referred to as 'sitcoms' (situation comedies), but the phrase is misleading. Their real value, as with the action/drama shows, involves character rather than situation. There is nothing inherently funny about a lower middle-class family in Queens (*All in the Family*), or about a single woman working for a television news programme in Minneapolis (*Mary Tyler Moore*). There is something basically humorous about the characters Carroll O'Connor and Mary Tyler Moore have fashioned over the years and the ensemble playing of these two shows. The significance of character as opposed to plot, setting or situation is clear even in the action shows, which are ostensibly devoted to event. The two most successful TV detectives at the moment are Peter Falk's Columbo and Telly Savalas' Kojak; and it isn't what they do that gets people to tune in week after week, but what they are. Indeed, both of these egregiously idiosyncratic characterisations verge on the comic.

This dependence on character is a function of the basic structure of TV entertainment. The unit of television is the series, not the individual show (which is why, among other reasons, the 'Golden Age' of TV drama was really Gilt), which gives television an advantage in building character over every other narrative medium except perhaps the novel saga. This is also why TV is not so much a medium of stories as of moods and atmospheres. We tune in not to find out what is happening (because generally the same things are always happening) but to spend some time with the characters—which is also, of course, the reason for the resounding success of talk shows.

Television is not only better equipped than most other media to deal with subtle development of character; it is conversely poorly equipped to succeed in other general dramatic elements. Because it is so much less intense (it gives us less visual and aural information) than cinema, action and spectacle come off more poorly than in the movie theatre. And because it is less intimate than live theatre, it can't deal as well with the high drama of ideas and emotions. The real art of television is character, and there are examples from Jack Webb's Sergeant Friday to Mary Tyler Moore, from George C. Scott's *East Side/West Side* to *The Forsyte Saga*, to prove that point.*

*In pure aesthetic terms, television has one other salient advantage over other dramatic media: the images are fairly easily and often thrillingly abstracted and distorted. For a variety of technological reasons, TV is much more like moving paintings than 'moving pictures' are. The new group of video artists—notably Nam June Paik—have utilised this advantage to great effect.

There is one factor, however, that prevents series like these from reaching their full potential in terms of character: they are open-ended. A successful TV series can run nearly for ever. (The 20-year-old *Gunsmoke* was recently cancelled not because Kitty, Doc and Mat Dillon had lost their appeal, but because network executives had decided that Westerns drew a rural, middle-aged audience which wasn't as attractive to advertisers as it might be.) The result is that series characters, like Pirandello's, can become frozen in the eternal moment, never developing, never changing. The 'closed-end' BBC and ITV series that American Public Television has now been importing for five years have demonstrated the value of that form, even to commercial network executives. In the 1970s the trend has been to shorter seasons (26, 22 or even fewer episodes, rather than the standard 39 of the 1950s), and experiments with anthology series that share their time period with other programmes and strictly limited series (usually based on popular novels). While closed-end programming is in general more exciting, there is little chance that it will supersede open-ended series. A successful programme simply has far too great a profit potential to be closed down for aesthetic or dramatic reasons, even when it is perfectly clear to everyone from viewers to actors to executives that a series has outlived its potential. *M.A.S.H.*, for example, a series which in many ways was better than the Altman film on which it was based, began to deteriorate after two years. It isn't the characters who become less intriguing but their situation, for it's the situation that generates the plots.

Other successful comedies of the 1970s have avoided the downhill slide of the long-running series almost by accident by generating spin-offs, each of which altered the situation of the parent show. Two of the supporting characters of *Mary Tyler Moore* (*Phyllis* and *Rhoda*) now have series of their own. MTM Enterprises, organised originally to produce Moore's show, is now responsible for three other programmes as well as *Mary* and its spin-offs. Norman Lear, Bud Yorkin and their Tandem Productions company have been even more successful. Their original show *All in the Family* is itself a spin-off, an Americanisation of the British *Till Death Us Do Part*.

The staff in 'Beacon Hill'. George Rose (Hacker) on left, Beatrice Straight seated



It has given birth (so far) to three spin-offs and is, in fact, even a 'grandmother', since one of these three (*Good Times*) was spun off from another (*Maude*). The third, *The Jeffersons*, is so far childless. Lear and Yorkin followed the same pattern for *Sanford and Son* (based on *Steptoe and Son*), whose score to date is no spin-offs but three direct imitations. Success in TV reduplicates itself; and the recent history of network prime time shows a pattern of increasing refinement, as marginally successful types are cut and replaced with slightly modified duplicates of the most successful.

ABC, it might be noted, is at present considering not one but four spin-offs for replacement duty for ailing programmes. The four represent the complete range of spin-off possibilities: *Cooley High* is based on a popular movie and combines Black, High School and 1950s nostalgia elements; *Tabitha* revives the daughter, now grown up, of the witch played by Elizabeth Montgomery in *Bewitched*, a popular show of the early Sixties based on the movie *I Married a Witch*; *Ponzie* spins off a character from a series called *Happy Days*, and *Carleton the Doorman* does the same for a minor but popular character from *Rhoda*.

There are no longer any regularly scheduled individual dramas of the Playhouse 90 type on the network schedule (and haven't been for years). Only four variety programmes appeared on the 1975 schedule, a third as many as were slotted only a few years ago. Theatrical films, a staple since the early 1960s, which at one point threatened to dominate programming every night of the week, are down to five from a high of eight a couple of years ago. In effect, there are only two significant kinds of series left: the half-hour comedy and the full-hour action drama. Of the twenty comedies in the schedule, all but three are spin-offs or imitations of *Mary Tyler Moore* or *All in the Family* or were produced by MTM Enterprises or Tandem Productions. (Of those three, *When Things Were Rotten* is Mel Brooks' parody of Robin Hood, and *On the Rocks*, written by Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, is a spin-off from *Porridge*.)

The situation is only a little more various when it comes to action/drama. Here one can identify four or five families of shows, ranging from the domestic exercises in nostalgia (*Walt Disney*, *The Waltons*) to the proto-fascist mayhem at the extreme end of the cop/private eye spectrum. There are thirteen programmes which are best classified simply as 'drama' (as opposed to 'action') because they evince little or no violence. These fall into two families: 'corn' (*Walt Disney*, *The Waltons*, *Little House on the Prairie*)—there are seven—and Doctor/Lawyer shows (six) often with interchangeable names: *Doctors' Hospital*, *Medical Center*, *Medical Story*.

Most of the hour-long programmes fall at the 'action' end of the spectrum, at their best intriguing mysteries, at their worst crude excuses for blood and guts. There are 28 programmes in this category: 13 cop shows (*Columbo*, *Kojak* and company) and 10 private eyes, from *Cannon* to *Ellery Queen*. Of the paltry five that fit neither category, two are appallingly dull science fiction fantasies and three offer at least the lure of less usual professions: para-medics,



A place for women: Bea Arthur in 'Maude' . . .

truckers and a TV investigative reporter. It is worth noting that two out of these three (*Movin' On* and *Mobile One*) are produced by Jack Webb.

If you have seen *Mary Tyler Moore*, *All in the Family*, *Kojak* and *Columbo*, you know just about all there is to know about American commercial television. A sense of the other 63 prime-time network hours can easily be obtained by extrapolating from these shows. The 1975 schedule revealed only one programme that could be called experimental, and that is itself a spin-off.

CBS, responsible for most of the innovative programming of the last five years, has given a place to *Beacon Hill*, which attempts to be an American version of *Upstairs/Downstairs*. Aside from the Norman Lear programmes, it is the only dramatic series to be shot on tape rather than film (which makes a significant difference to the degree of intimacy of the show); it is also the only programme being made in New York, and although the differentiation between New York and Hollywood acting is not nearly so great as it used to be, this is still an advantage. More important, *Beacon Hill* (the name comes from Boston's wealthiest upper-class district) eschews the nearly universal dramatic focus on professions and action in favour of what is ideally a situation which permits some commentary on the history of American class structure. Theoretically, this is ultimate TV. The series structure allows time for the development of complex characters. The impetus for the programme—historical rather than situational (diachronic rather than synchronic)—provides a framework in which important issues can be explored. And finally the mode—tape rather than film—is 'purer', and simplifies the aesthetic equation. These are the primary factors, together with high production values, which have assured the success of the exported BBC and ITV series, and which have given British television a not undeserved reputation as the best in the world.

But while the form of the British closed-end historical series has survived the sea change, the content has not. The main (and probably fatal) trouble with *Beacon Hill* is basic: it preserves the upstairs/downstairs dichotomy, and American class relation-

ships just won't fit into that structure without forcing. Realising this inherent problem, the producers of *Beacon Hill* decided immediately on some modifications of their model. The period was shifted to the 1920s; the 'upstairs' family, the Lassiters, are not Boston 'Brahmins' (equivalent to the original Bellamys) but new-rich Irish, hardly a generation off the boat. (That such a family neither would nor could have lived on the exclusively WASP Beacon Hill has been a sticky point.) While downstairs the producers have found an excellent equivalent of Gordon Jackson's Hudson in George Rose's Hacker, part of their problem with the other characters is that such large household staffs were in fact extraordinarily uncommon. When they did exist, they acted as revolving doors for a succession of immigrants who served only so long as they had to before moving out into the world.

In short, an American *Upstairs/Downstairs* wouldn't look at all like the original. In order to have the same degree of historical relevance, it would have to be not about the relationships between classes but about the incessant flow up the scale from one class to another. (Which was true in the Twenties, if not any longer.) An American *Upstairs/Downstairs* should look a lot more like *Family at War*. But the Robert Stigwood Organisation didn't own the rights to that series. The result is a skewed perspective that may be fatal to *Beacon Hill*.*

This may be the best place to say a few words about the fourth American network, the Public Broadcasting System, a non-commercial organisation of mainly educational local stations founded in 1969 and operating under the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Funded mainly by contributions from member stations and a small yearly grant from the Federal Government, PBS has not yet attained a status that would allow it directly to challenge the giant networks, but in six years it has nevertheless had an effect on general commercial broadcasting. For the most part, its influence is owed to the British shows it has imported. Its first critical success was *The Forsyte Saga* in 1970. PBS's telecast of *Civilisation* the same year led to CBS's acquisition of Alistair Cooke's *America* several years later. The PBS run of *Upstairs/Downstairs*, beginning two seasons ago, marked a second quantum jump in popularity; but the public network had no significant ratings success until the autumn of 1974, when it began broadcasting five-year-old *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The Pythons' 'British humour', long thought to be anathema on American television, made it possible for PBS for the first time to challenge directly the commercial networks' domination of the airwaves, if only for half an hour each week.

It should be clear by now that nearly all the major innovations in American television during the last five years—the move to shorter, closed-end series; the use of tape rather than film; the advent of relevant and incisive character comedy—have either been the direct result of British influence or at least have been foreshadowed by English productions.

* An accurate forecast. Since this article was written CBS has cancelled *Beacon Hill*.

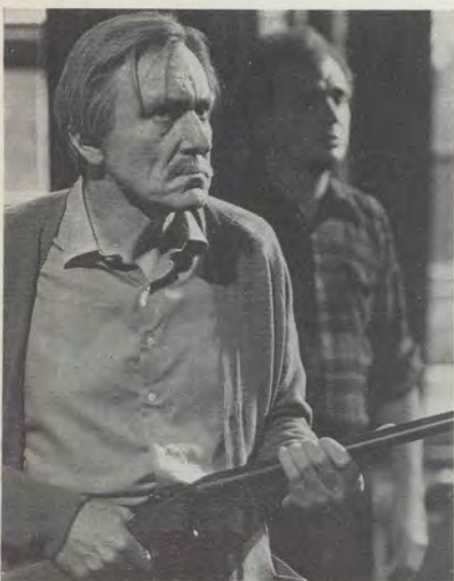


. . . Lee Grant in NBC's 'Fay'

If we ignore for the moment the work of Jack Webb and the amusing caricatures of the Columbo-Kojak genre, the only important type of show with native roots is the Mary Tyler Moore family. Moore spent a long period of training in the 1960s as the wife in the Dick Van Dyke show. The Van Dyke programme was the leading comedy show throughout most of the middle 1960s, having refined certain elements of the vaudeville comedy which was the high point of the 1950s, and marked very clearly by that long tradition which stretches back beyond the birth of television, through the short career of network radio, back to the last days of vaudeville.

Mary Tyler Moore added to this traditional and effective style a sense of irony and a comic relevance which have made her show (and its spin-offs) perhaps the most interesting wholly American TV inventions of the 1970s. The MTM style doesn't have the bite of the Norman Lear shows, but makes up for it with characters who are more recognisably human than Lear's cartoons. More important, the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* was the first narrative programme to feature an intelligent, independent woman as its main character. True, 'Mary' is no conscious feminist; also true that MTM Enterprises, almost as an act of penance for the freedom Mary enjoys on her own show, follows it up immediately on the Saturday night schedule with the *Bob Newhart Show*, which gives us Suzanne Pleshette's mousy housewife standing dutifully by the door to greet her hard-working husband. But these things must be judged in context, and before *Mary Tyler Moore* American television was most definitely a wasteland so far as women were concerned. *Mary* has since been joined by other independent TV women: her spin-offs, *Rhoda* and *Phyllis*, Lear's *Maude*, and the heroines of the first two dramatic series to feature women in starring roles—Angie Dickinson in David Gerber's *Police Woman* and Anne Meara in Paramount's *Kate McShane*. No matter what the quality of these shows, their existence indicates that, as far as women are concerned, American television is years ahead of the absurdly sexist American cinema. The post-war cinema, that is. One of the major events of this television

THE GLITTERING PRIZES



When *The Glittering Prizes* is shown this month on BBC-2 it will be exactly four years from my first meeting to discuss the project. I'd been pleased and surprised to hear that Frederic Raphael wanted to write again for television because it had been more than ten years since he'd done so. In the meantime he had written scripts for *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *Two for the Road*, as well as novels, but now, he said, he wanted to create a novel for television about a group of people who were at Cambridge in the early 1950s, as he was himself, following them through twenty years. It wasn't to be a *roman à clef*, he said, to forestall fears about it being esoteric, though he hoped it would say pertinent things about his generation, many of whom are now at the tops of their particular trees.

I liked the plan very much and so did the BBC's Head of Plays, Gerald Savory. The deal was eventually done and for a fraction of his fee for one movie, Freddie would write eight 50-minute plays—'because I can write what I want to, say what I want to, which is unusual in movies.'

New Year's Day 1973, I received a letter from Freddie. 'I am stuck in these plays like a saw in green wood, pinched and shrieking,' and asking for more time. Not to agree would have been stupid, and I was fairly confident that when the plays started coming they'd be good. There was one worry in my mind, though: whether he could contain the number of characters, sets and film locations so that I could produce them for a fairly normal television budget. Meanwhile, Christopher Morahan had taken over from Gerald Savory as Head of Plays. It was important that he should have enthusiasm for the project, too, if it was ever to get on the screen.

The first play arrived at the start of April and fell open at the last page. 'Scene 76. Interior. St. Peter's, Rome. Day.' I shut it again fast, gulped, then began reading from page one. When you commission a script you're probably always a little more indulgent than to one you just get out of the blue, but Freddie's first play seemed far and away better than anything I'd read for ages: sharp, accurate, witty and moving. My enthusiasm for it was only tempered by the fact that it was really a film script, in brief scenes, calling for dozens of different settings, with outdoor locations in London, the country, Cambridge and Italy. Its cast was large and its running time a great deal longer than fifty minutes.

I voiced all this to Freddie, who felt cuts could come later but that he was never going to be able to contain the plays within fifty minutes. So, with Christopher Morahan's agreement, the contract was changed to six 75-minute plays. At this moment Freddie

thought of the title *The Glittering Prizes*—from a quotation by F. E. Smith ('The world continues to offer glittering prizes to those who have stout hearts and sharp swords'). The second play came in September—concerned more with Cambridge theatricals, though as he said, 'a sort of parable of post-war ambitions and internal politics.' I liked it less than the first play and said so, but he'd made it much more containable in financial terms than the first part. By February 1974, I had four plays in my hand. Freddie and I had agreed that cutting and reworking would come after all six were delivered. During the summer, Aubrey Singer was appointed Controller of BBC-2. Might the series founder on his disapproval of the whole idea? He read two of them and fortunately agreed that they looked promising.

Every autumn, BBC heads of department submit their projects for the following financial year to the Controllers of the two channels. Although the BBC's licence fee increased in 1974, the rate of inflation effectively meant that we had to produce plays for 1975 at an average figure around 15 per cent below the 1974 figure; this was a great worry because our series had been conceived and written at a time when there was more money. My assistant, Fraser Lowden, and I worked out a skin-tight budget of £210,000, which was dangerously close to the maximum amount we knew we could obtain. Christopher Morahan and I then had a very heavy meeting when I had to agree that, come what may, I was not to exceed the budget by one penny. But was I, he asked, going to damage *The Glittering Prizes* by skimping? Should I perhaps consider doing six other plays altogether? I believed it was now or never and answered no to both questions with as much confidence as I could muster; Christopher then presented the project and an average budget to Aubrey Singer. He gave his O.K.

Next came the problem of a director. At first, I had wanted a single director for all six, but the programmes were required for transmission in January 1976, and for one director to do them we might have needed a production period longer than nine months. Between April 1975 and January 1976 there wasn't time for that method, so I plumped for two people directing three plays each.

Freddie and I had been discussing directors for some time and I had recommended Waris Hussein and Robert Knights, both of whom I'd worked with before, and both of whom had been at Cambridge, which was important. Most important, I felt they could work together, as they would have to. By November, the fifth play was delivered and Waris and Rob had been sent scripts. I had worked out studio dates that began at the end of June and ran every four weeks until November. These dates are requested by the Drama Department from the BBC's Planning Department, which schedules usage of the seven video studios at

'The Glittering Prizes': Tom Conti in the first play; Emma Carter and John Gregg; Eric Porter as the ageing fascist; Frederic Raphael and actress Emily Richard in Cambridge (Photo: Mark Shivas)

the Television Centre. Usually the producer of a 75-minute play requests three days' studio. He can perhaps get more if his budget will afford the extra cash involved.

By January, Waris and Rob had said they liked the plays. But they didn't know each other, so with my script editor, Richard Broke, we met several times and after a little not too acrimonious bargaining agreed that Waris would direct the first, third and fourth and Rob the second, fifth and sixth. The sixth was still not delivered, but Freddie had indicated to me the area it would cover. Meanwhile, I was haggling with the Design Department for either one or two designers. After two or three meetings, I was forced to agree on two people (Spencer Chapman and Sally Hulke, both very experienced) because the turn-round would be too quick for one person unless he or she had a very long preparation period before the whole series started production. I also arranged for director's assistants, secretaries and floor managers, so that both Waris and Rob would have their team with them throughout. I asked for a particular video camera crew to work on all six plays, booked the lighting men, the make-up supervisor and the costume designer. In each case, the producer requests certain people that he and the director like to work with, and who can work with each other; the organisers of each department usually manage to allocate the people he requests from among their staff. All this involves the producer in cajoling, wheedling, a little bluster, occasionally shouting and banging the table.

In February, I attended a demonstration of Front Axial Projection, whereby you do not build a background set, you project a still picture or film of it on grey plastic and the actors can move around in front of it as though within it—a process Stanley Kubrick used in *2001*. The BBC now had facilities for this at their film studios. Perhaps we could do 'Interior, St. Peter's, Day.' As Kenneth Clark couldn't get into St. Peter's for *Civilisation* our chances were nil, even if we could afford to go there. At the end of the month came Play 6, called *A Double Life*. A marvellous piece. Freddie added in a letter, 'On the practical side, you will see that I have cut my cloth on admirably austere lines and there are no cut-aways to Samoa or bridge games in the Sistine Chapel . . .' Freddie went on to say how he would re-write Play 2 so that it would become more accessible to the television audience.

We now had six plays. Any one of them can be watched without reference to the others, but there are cross-references and continuations of character which make each play richer if you have watched the earlier ones. If any one figure dominates, it is Adam Morris, the writer, who bears many resemblances to Freddie himself; he is the central figure of the first, third and sixth plays, and appears also in the second. Such continuations make planning a series a far more complex operation than the simple film or play. Both actors and sets have to be retained over a long period. Fraser and I now complete our chart showing which characters appear in which plays. When the actor is contracted to play Adam, he will have to be paid for his four 'performances' plus a 'retainer' for the period when he's not working for us. We work out a fee that an

actor to play the part might cost. The character of Stephen Taylor, the ageing fascist in Play 3, will have to be played by an established actor of great force—the amount could well be in four figures. And so on. We add up these rough figures for each episode and decide how much to allow from the overall budget. Are we going to be able to get the right actors for the amounts we have allowed?

March 24. Waris, Rob, Richard and I spend three very exciting days while Freddie talks about the plays, why he wrote them, what motivates his characters. We question him for amplification of points we don't understand. We talk about cuts we may need for money reasons, for reasons of length. Several scenes from the first play, for instance, will have to be cut: we cannot possibly contain that number of sets in the studio, or afford to stage a big scene in the Cambridge Union on film. Can our audience be expected to remember over the four weeks between Play 1 and Play 5 a character with only a brief scene in Play 1? Should that character perhaps be dropped until Play 5? If we drop him, have we removed one of the moments that don't advance the plot but instead give the play so much feeling of Cambridge? Freddie takes most of the comments and requests, often making counter suggestions and improvements. I had feared he might be difficult to persuade, adamant about his text, but he is eminently practical. He regales us with marvellous anecdotes, but if we all seem to be getting along too well he can inject a little danger and remind us with a sharp smile that he expects the best. Freddie returns to France; he will immediately work on the rewrites and cutting of the first two plays.

Next day Waris, Rob and I see our first actor—for the part of Alan Parks, the Australian interviewer who appears in the second, third and fourth plays. But he's not right. This is the first of scores of chats with actors that Waris and Rob have for the eighty or more speaking parts in the series. I see many fewer, and always when Waris and Rob have made a shortlist for each character. I had believed that the modest size of our budget might have put some actors beyond our reach, but our main problem is different: to cast a very large number of 'running' characters quite quickly. Waris and Rob only begin official work on the series in April and Waris is to begin location filming for the first play at the end of May. Many of the characters have to age from around twenty to forty; most of the parts require great skill and experience, which is difficult to find in actors in their twenties. 'Couples' have to be matched, balances and differences must be considered. After many interviews, Waris and Rob meet Tom Conti, who becomes our first and indeed only runner for Adam. While his agent haggles about money, we interview at length for other parts, sometimes a dozen people in a day. Will we lose him? He has other offers from elsewhere to consider. The whole series seems to stand or fall by this casting. When Tom's contract is at last fixed, we introduce him to Barbara Kellermann, the girl we believe could play his wife. They get on, they look right together, and we cast her.

Now there are problems with insufficient money for sets. Spencer Chapman asks for another hundred 'man hours' beyond the

1,250 we have allocated to build more sets. We can't cut any more studio sets from the script, or extend the location filming, so he gets it, in return for a promise to 'give back later in the series'. As most of the other scripts look heavy on sets, I've no idea how this can be achieved. Then Judy Allen, the costume lady, says she hasn't enough time or money. 1953 is hard to find the right clothes for and we are late with our casting, so she has last-minute fittings; her staff need to work overtime, which costs twice as much. I decide to give her more on this episode, again in return for having less later, when the cast is smaller and the period less of a problem. I believe I can recoup both these overspends later. I'd better be right.

Bank Holiday Monday, May 26th 1975, is our first day for the cast to meet each other, always a slightly tense occasion, but particularly exciting at the start of a six-month project. Freddie has met only one of the cast before but he's obviously pleased at their rightness. Next day, we're filming a summer 'toboggan' run on Hampstead Heath, which will cut together with later scenes shot near Cambridge. The hillside is steep, so the stuntman from *Day for Night* doubles for both Tom and David Robb, who plays Adam's college room-mate. The day after that we're by the river at Cambridge for summer scenes there. A King's College eight runs smack into our four actors in their punt. Brian Tufano, our film cameraman, shoots the whole incident—the BBC's insurance company may want to see the footage.

When the week's location work is complete we spend a day at the film studios at Ealing. Three shots of the interior of St. Peter's by the front axial process take hours to set up, and the slides we use for the backgrounds are unfortunately far from perfect. Will the sequence look any good, and, if not, where can we reshoot it anyway? Next day, Waris starts three weeks rehearsal of the scenes we shall record on videotape in the studios, the majority of the play. Meanwhile the film editor cuts together the 20 minutes Waris has shot, while Robert Knights and I discuss the second play and cast parts in it. My own Morgan car is measured for a camera mounting for filming a scene in that play. Rob and Richard Broke and I also work on the fifth play, which is too long and has more film scenes than we can do. We shall make suggestions for cuts and see if Freddie agrees.

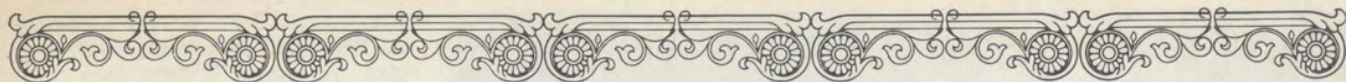
A few days before Waris begins his three studio days, he does a final 'run' of the whole thing for the lighting men, the sound man and the video camera crew. A day or so later, there's one for me and Freddie. The ensemble playing is terrific. Elizabeth Spriggs and David Robb are most moving as Adam Morris' upper-class Catholic adversaries. Tom Conti's performance is very right but a little over-embroidered, 'busy': this is our main criticism, and we discuss it with Tom.

When we're in the studio, I consider it my function to keep my eye on details of sets, costume and make-up that Waris has little time for, yet to take a more 'detached' view than he can, attempting to see the whole piece as an entity. Freddie's notes are admirable, clear. He seems to be enjoying

Eric Rohmer's



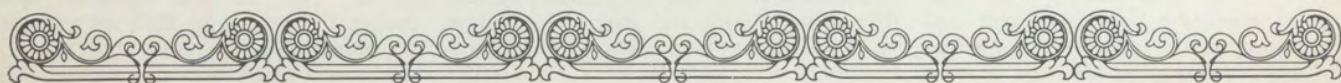
La Marquise d'O



Eric Rohmer's new film, based on the novella by Heinrich von Kleist, is a Franco-German co-production, filmed last summer in a baroque setting near Ansbach. The cast of German stage actors is headed by Edith Clever (the Marquise) and Bruno Ganz (the officer). Nestor Almendros is the



cameraman. This is Rohmer's first film in costume (as well as his first in a foreign language); but he doesn't see it, he says, as a period piece: 'Kleist was far ahead of his time: the film I'm making should have the same effect on its audience as the novel had on its readers in the 19th century.'





Delphine Seyrig and Marguerite Duras

India Song and Marguerite Duras

an interview by Carlos Clarens

It doesn't come as too great a surprise to learn that Carl T. Dreyer is Marguerite Duras' favourite director. There is that famous sequence in Dreyer's *Vampyr* in which the hero wanders into a barn, deserted but for shadows on the wall, coupled and dancing to a polka that trails off on a sinister chord. The characters in Duras' *India Song* are likewise phantoms dancing in a filmic dimension, memories conjured by the disembodied voices of guests and gossipers at an embassy reception in the Calcutta of the mid-thirties, by those who are the subject of the gossip, and by a somewhat more detached narrator. The only suggestion of the Indian locale is conveyed by the voice of a beggar woman, a wheedling, incomprehensible sing-song; all we see of an outside world is a façade, a tennis court, an overgrown garden, a livid sky at dusk or dawn.

Indoors, the atmosphere is almost sub-aqueous. The camera picks up a framed photograph of a woman, pans over a dress and some jewels, round a mirrored salon. A woman in a strapless gown the colour of earth and several men in formal evening wear drift in and out of each other's arms, dancing sedately while an off-screen orchestra plays a rumba, ragtime, a tango, a recurrent slow ballad. The prevailing mood is one of deathly *weltschmerz*: elegant Europeans going through a silent choreography of boredom, despair, sexual attraction; off-screen, we hear the sounds of madness, reports of death and suicide.

To these relatively open images, sometimes reminiscent of 1930s magazine advertisements, we affix the story of Anne-Marie Stretter, whom we take to be the character played, or rather embodied, by Delphine Seyrig; this, however, is part of an identification process that the film itself now and then repudiates. It's always possible to attach some sort of spirituality to an open image, to translate a visual statement into psychological, moral, even political cinema. *India Song* could be (and has been) read as

anti-imperialist, the characters dying of colonial sickness, of isolation from an alien world that gradually alienates them from each other. But surrendering so readily to one's personal conditioning takes much away from the filmic value.

The photograph on the piano could be that of the Stretter woman, promiscuous wife of a French diplomat; the gown and jewels, all that remains after she drowned in the Indian Ocean. Seyrig *could* be Stretter, that's enough. Likewise we invest the actor Michel Lonsdale with the madness and despair of the vice-consul at Lahore, whom we know to be in disgrace from snatches of gossip and who, corroded by his passion for La Stretter, goes hysterical at the reception; while the soundtrack reverberates with his howling, Seyrig and her partners remain serene and imperturbable. At various moments, she is joined by Claude Mann (Michael Richardson, her official lover), by Mathieu Carrière (the Austrian attaché) and by Didier Flamand (the young guest); and they are joined at one point by Vernon Dobtcheff (a friend of the Stretters) for a dawn excursion to the

Delta islands. In a sustained take, Seyrig and her court (minus Lonsdale) are captured in formal stillness beside a bay-window slowly flooding with light. There is no spatial trajectory in the film, merely an itinerary of the mind and memory. Time and place do not change; no new consciousness emerges. Time is not even chronology; this is provided by the men in Anne-Marie Stretter's life.

By October 1975, seventy thousand admissions to *India Song* had been sold in Paris alone: 'the population of a sizable village,' as Duras herself remarked. It's the first of her six features to earn such a relatively wide audience, being less abstruse or forbidding than, for instance, *La Femme du Gange* (1973), which in retrospect appears as a first draft to the present film. On the contrary, *India Song* rewards the viewer with some elegant, languorous images (shot in 16 mm colour by Bruno Nuyten), and its contrapuntal soundtrack, although more demanding than the searing monologues of *Hiroshima mon Amour*, carries the same incantatory power.

To young film students here and abroad, raised on the disjointed image and sound of the Underground and its fragmented or non-narrative techniques, *India Song* can hardly seem avant-garde or pretentious. Perhaps a certain familiarity with other Duras works would enhance one's enjoyment, but it's not really indispensable to be aware that Michael Richardson once deserted Lol V. Stein for Anne-Marie Stretter (in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*) or that the vice-consul at Lahore is the leading character in a novel (*Le Vice-Consul*). It's much more crucial to become attuned to Duras' feminine sensibility, and so far only Molly Haskell among the New York reviewers has championed the film from a feminist point of view. (One is reminded of the late film-maker Maya Deren, who suggested, back in 1957, that a certain passive *horizontalité*, in opposition to the eventful *verticalité* of male-oriented films, could become woman's contribution to the medium.)

The interview that follows took place at the Duras country home in Néauphle-le-Château, outside Paris, the same house in which she filmed *Nathalie Granger* and which she bought after the sale of film rights to her third novel, *Barrage contre le Pacifique*, filmed by René Clément in 1957 and released in Britain and the U.S. as *The Sea Wall*. It was also here that Duras and Alain Resnais collaborated on the screenplay of *Hiroshima mon Amour* shortly thereafter.

CLARENS: The character played by Didier Flamand in *India Song*—the young guest—is very shadowy, much more so than the others. With the exception of Michel Lonsdale, who is distinguished by his madness, the men are almost interchangeable, especially Flamand and Vernon Dobtcheff, who are silhouettes rather than characters. How did they come into the story?

DURAS: The Flamand character arrives during the reception. He's an old friend of Anne-Marie Stretter's; but the thing the young guest and the young attaché

(Mathieu Carrière) have in common is that they don't know each other. I'm not too sure, but I think the attaché knew M. Stretter but not his wife. But what do you mean by shadowy?

For instance, in the insomnia scene during the monsoon . . .

. . . where they come out to sleep, on the carpet in the private drawing-room that opens on to the gardens . . .

. . . and one feels that he carries a dramatic charge in the film, but I can't see exactly what. There is no dialogue with him, as there is with the attaché. He's rather a ghostly presence.

I think he's sleeping with Anne-Marie Stretter, though casually, without love, and that she dies before the young Austrian attaché, Carrière, can sleep with her. It's of no real consequence.

It's simply a chronology . . .

Yes. I've talked about a 'population' of men. There are three of them, but there could well be ten. There are five men in her life but you see three of them, plus the vice-consul, whom I count as coming from outside.

And Stretter? You never see him? You've never seen him?

No . . .

Is that why you didn't introduce him?

There was no point.

Could you do the same thing with Lol V. Stein? Could she be enacted?

What I want to film more than anything else, even now, is *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. But I don't think anyone will put up the money.

Even after *India Song*?

There's more hope, but for a project like that . . . it means a three-hour film, a dozen characters, five or six locations . . .

A script does exist of *Lol V. Stein*?

It started out as one. I had an American commission to write a script. It was offered to Joseph Losey. Then suddenly I turned it into a book and I withdrew it. *India Song* went through book, recital, play, the three possible disciplines, three different readings. I don't know whether it should be staged, filmed or read. *Lol V. Stein* began as a film. I wanted to make it in two parts: first the ball and the illness, then the marriage and the recurrence of the illness. That way it would cost less money and I'd be less awed.

Is it spending all that money that awes you?

No, it's filming *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* that awes me.

And between the two there is *Le Vice-Consul*, but that has in part become *India Song*.

Or rather, *India Song* assumes that *Le Vice-Consul* has been written. I could never have achieved that depth of focus if it hadn't been based on a text on which I'd spent two years. But there is a radical difference between *India Song* and *Le Vice-Consul*; which is that *Le Vice-Consul* ends with a sort of orgy in the Islands. She sleeps with two men at once . . .

But there is an echo of that in the film, in the insomnia scene, with all three in very erotic poses, three people momen-

tarily in extremely intimate contact . . .

. . . Very sensual. It's a physical intimacy which may be the true intimacy. I can't conceive of intimacy . . . or rather, yes, I can. There are two sorts of intimacy. One is corporal, and the other is something I don't know what to call . . .

. . . affective?

. . . within the family, for instance. That exists.

You've skipped the theatrical stage. Have you any thoughts of a theatrical production?

Yes, indeed. In fact I've just had a letter from London, from Peter Hall. But I won't be involving myself personally with *India Song* any more. It's made.

At one time, though, it was to be staged and filmed simultaneously, with Claude Régy doing the stage production.

Pierre Cardin [the designer] put a stop to that. But in any case I wouldn't have followed through on the production. I can't be on both sides, theatre and cinema.



The vice-consul: Michel Lonsdale

It's impossible. I was for the film; I was defending the film, the body of the film, and I didn't want the film to go into the theatre. I said to Claude, 'You must stick to the book as it was written, the film is none of your business.' But unfortunately he'd seen the film. We very nearly fell out over it, it was all quite dramatic. Finally we became friends again when the play was dropped.

But you have always been cinema oriented. You were a scriptwriter. You wrote *Hiroshima mon Amour*, *Une Aussi Longue Absence*, *Moderato Cantabile* for other film-makers. You were drawn to the cinema . . .

No. It brought in money. When I did scripts for other directors it didn't prevent me from writing, it didn't take the place of writing. And I always did go on writing. But since I've been making films I've stopped writing, or at any rate I write much less. I've just written a script which I'm hoping to film soon. It's called *Véra Baxter*.

But there is an enormous progression in your work from *La Musica* to *India Song*.

I don't know if there's an enormous progression . . . well, yes, because I've done a lot of daring things in *India Song*. Personally, I think *India Song* shows fantastic daring. But perhaps you have to be in the cinema . . . I don't know if other people realise. Telling a story inside out like that sweeps away all the laws of narrative. And at the same time you have the constant contradiction of the story, the photograph of the dead woman in view of the camera while her living self is also present, though

off-screen. But there was no theory behind it. I just did it. People have talked about an extraordinary, spell-binding fascination. But it would never have worked if it had been theoretical. It's anti-theoretical. Absolutely intentional, you understand, but completely instinctive, never formulated as a principle.

You always planned to have the voices-off?

Are you kidding! When I started . . . I can show you a script in which there are extras, people chatting, women in white, fluttering fans.

At what stage did you decide to take out all these characters? When you saw the sets?

There was February, March and then in April I began the stripping down. I was shooting in June. With *Véra Baxter*, though, I have a script which absolutely anybody could direct. I think I'll do it soon; I have the money. Any professional film-maker would do a better job, but no one else would have enough faith in it. I'm extremely incompetent. But it's an incompetence I want to preserve.

According to your cameraman Bruno Nuyten, film-making is still a source of wonderment for you, as though you were discovering the cinema for the first time. Did the cinema mean very little to you before?

It struck me as very difficult. But it's less difficult than writing.

Because you have the whole crew behind you, whereas writing is a solitary process, and as painful as psychoanalysis?

It's different, but it's not as though I had invented the cinema. At least, *India Song* is a film I've invented, because I don't see how it fits in with anything else. Do you? Entirely voice-off?

Yes, the American underground. People whose interests aren't at all literary have reached the same end by a different route.

With the same justification? Because my justification is complete. Death being in the script, the death of people, it works all the way. It isn't a whim but a necessity I couldn't avoid. It isn't a method of filming. I'm incapable of inventing such a thing. But I didn't come to the cinema out of nothing, I came from writing. So I have considerable experience of writing. So, when I experience wonderment, it isn't something I can really get from the implications of the visual image in itself, which I already know. Literature comprises everything. Everything. The text contains the image, the performances, the readers, the spectators, everything. So I can experience wonderment only at the result achieved. As though I were making a cake and it might flop but no, suddenly it's risen. That's where the wonder lies for me, but I do know that the cake exists, I know it's been made before, I know it can be done. Whereas you risk much more when you create a text. I'm saved by having my texts behind me. I'm not running any risks even if I make a complete hash of a film. Even if I made a hash of *India Song*, if the voice-off were flat, empty, intangible, unjustified, if it failed to connect with the images, if it were deadly dull—what do I risk? It can't wash out *Hiroshima*, it can't wipe out *Lol V.*

Stein, *L'Amour* and all the rest. So I went into that affair already assured of something. Of course, if it had really been my first film, I'd never have dared.

The press conference after the Cannes screening was also a unique occasion, with a film-maker talking about fictional characters as though they weren't imaginary but living people. That, too, was daring. Your characters occasionally slip away from you...

I can't quite visualise Anne-Marie Stretter making love, I don't see her when she's eating, I don't see her naked. I see her in certain places and at certain moments in her daily routine, but not always.

But when you saw one of your scripts directed by someone else—Dassin's 10.30 p.m. *Summer*, for instance—did you feel you could do it better?

I didn't think so then. It cost eight hundred million (old francs). It was after that I said to myself, I'm going to have a go anyway. That was why I made *La Musica*. That film and *The Sailor from Gibraltar* drove me to make my own.

How about the others? *Moderato Cantabile*?

It was thick. I didn't really like it very much, but I prefer it to *Lord of the Flies*, where I think the basic idea was naïve and that it was politically simplistic.

But you knew absolutely nothing about film technique, so you collaborated with Paul Seban on *La Musica*.

He looked after the camera and I did the cast. But there are two moments in the film that are mine: the scene with the mirror, and the one at the end, in the room. There the camera set-ups were mine. I used to look through the camera whenever I could, but Paul wasn't very pleased about that. 'Well, yes,' people said, 'but it's a conversation, it isn't cinema.' Right, I said, and the conversation is what the film is about. People still say that to me. It isn't cinema. You've no idea how much abuse there's been. A front page article in *Le Figaro* about *Hiroshima* when it came out. They seemed to be frightened...

It was the wind of change.

There was too much dialogue. Personally, and I'm speaking for a certain breed of person like myself, I think that the kind of cinema which people have defined as cinema over the years is dead. Just as nineteenth century literature, the literature of Balzac, is dead. So the cinema must develop another dimension, which I'm beginning to find in *India Song* and which I hope to explore even further in my next films.

Don't you think you may be passing from a very private period to a much more public one? I mean in your films, naturally.

But *India Song* is a very private film, with a mysterious potency. It's a film that will be seen by a hundred thousand people, but it is also one that people see differently. Many people have seen it two, three, even five times. Anne de Gasperi of the *Quotidien de Paris* makes regular visits to see it, but not in the spirit of going to the cinema. So, as you can see, it isn't cinema.

There's a new dimension... I don't know, offhand I can't quite put it into words. It's a co-existential dimension, some-

thing similar to what one finds in chemistry, simultaneously in the film and in the person watching it. In other words, there is a constant mutation in the film which corresponds to something parallel in you. As the film changes, so do you. It is no longer a story which you are being told from the outside and from which you remain aloof. Spectator and spectacle share a common existence. What I'm saying is meaningless, really... But since everything means something, even something that is meaningless, there's a grain of truth in it.

Don't you think there was something like that even in *Détruire*, dit-elle?

Yes, the essence was already there. People didn't really take it up, though, how the process of identification that functions for all spectators was destroyed in that film. And that left the spectator at sea, he no longer knew where he was. Why? Because Stein (Michel Lonsdale), even though in the film himself, identified with the people in *Détruire*. He therefore prevented the spectator from identifying, which meant that the spectator was forced out of the film. Or else he had to try to get back inside the film, but not by way of identification.

There was something ominous about the film, quite independent of the text.

An imminence...? But I was afraid myself, all the time, on *Détruire*. Only ten thousand people paid to see it. Perhaps it came too soon, four years ago. People wanted nice, clear, well-made stories.

Are you using voice-off again in *Véra Baxter*, or will you be returning to dialogue between actors?

It's an eminently sensible script. It's been passed by the Commission d'Avance sur Recettes. There are no voices-off in the script. No... there won't be any.

Whereas *India Song*, being an unfinished memory, fragmentary recollections concerning a dead woman, needed the voice-off?

Yes, that's so. In *India Song* I play an enormous part. In *Véra Baxter* I'm just the director, but in *India Song* I'm more than the director. I'm in the film. Because these are my ghosts, you see. I said this at Cannes: I am filming myself.

Does this explain that feeling of stripping yourself naked in the market-place? Something that never happened with books?

Since *Détruire*, dit-elle I've been writing as I filmed *India Song*. *L'Amour* was written that way, and *Détruire*, even *Les Parleuses*. But I hadn't yet made films like that. Now the cinema has caught up with this sort of writing. I find this very gratifying, and at the same time I realise I need no longer bother with thinking 'I'll sell this script and make a lot of money.' Because now I've proved to myself that I can write in the cinema... or rather, write cinema... On paper *Véra Baxter* is very 'written', but all the same the writing is more exterior, more controlled. I am completely mistress of my means, whereas with *India Song* I was afraid all the time.

Has *Véra Baxter* encountered Anne-Marie Stretter or Lol V. Stein?

No, she's not even any relation. *Véra Baxter* is sister to Nathalie Granger. It's

the other branch. But there's another film I want to make, another of my books called *L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas*, and that is certainly much closer to what I've been doing.

There's a marked kinship between Anne-Marie Stretter and Lol V. Stein. They are both women who have suffered such a severe emotional shock that they will never recover, only Lol V. Stein lives on whereas Anne-Marie gradually lets herself die. Nathalie Granger is quite different.

Really that was written by another writer. Nathalie Granger and *Véra Baxter* are writer's films, but I don't know the writer who made them as well as I do the other. They're mainstream works, even if you happen to think Nathalie Granger is a new form. The technique is one that has been used before in the cinema, approximately anyway. Whereas I know that *La Femme du Gange* and *India Song* have never been done before. The vice-consul's cries of love in *India Song* have never been heard before. They emanate from something other than cinema. For Nathalie Granger and *Véra Baxter*, on the other hand, I have cinematic reference points, even if I'm never aware of them. Everything depends on the images. Anyway...

It's like another unconscious...

Right. But which I know I control, I know I possess it. I'm comparatively relaxed now. For several months I wondered how to do *Véra Baxter*, and then it came to me; but while I was thinking about it, I knew it would come. I never experienced the terror of not finding a way.

Was it an unconscious quest?

It was a formal quest. I had the theme. I wanted to put a woman into a film, but not sociologically—to hell with that—and not psychologically. To put her *bodily* into a film, a little as I did with Isabelle Granger, as I did with the two female bodies in Nathalie Granger. I shut the house up and I put a camera on the two women inside it. That sounds simple. But it isn't. But I've done it with *Véra Baxter*. *India Song* was much more difficult because I had to put myself into Calcutta, into leprosy, into hunger.

A real psychodrama.

Almost; you could call it that. But it was done like a poem.

I thought you hated the word poetic...

I do, but I have to put it that way. It was done like a poem.

Because it's musical, rhythmic...

Because it doesn't depend on chronology, it fights shy of the sense of signification. The meaning is exposed at every moment, without my worrying about it. The music of *India Song*, the inner music of the text which creates the meaning, comes afterwards, without my intervention. But this meaning isn't pre-existent: I don't know why I'm filming those dresses, with the camera moving in at a particular tempo. Afterwards I know that death was in the camera. At the time I simply needed a certain motion to go with Anne-Marie's movement. Purely and entirely physical, you see? Therefore musical.

The feeling seems to have communicated itself to the actors...



'India Song': Claude Mann, Delphine Seyrig, Didier Flamand: '... phantoms dancing in a filmic dimension ...'

After a couple of days it really became quite extraordinary.

One of the loveliest things in the film is the moment when Delphine Seyrig leaves the piano and is escorted away by Claude Mann in a completely unnaturalistic movement. It is as though she were letting herself go.

You see movements like that under water. Did you know that shot was done late one night? I hadn't anything planned. It was three o'clock in the morning, and we were just packing up after a night's shooting when I said 'We'll do one last shot.' It corresponds to the end of the reception, it's the morning of the last day. I think it's at this same moment, on the following evening, that she will kill herself. There's also the shot of the journey, motionless ...

... with some extremely theatrical effects.

Well, I wouldn't have been able to do that four years ago! To be a little more specific about what I was trying to say earlier about the cinema: when people talk, or rather when Sartre talks, about the process of identification that is necessary before the mystery of the performance can take place, I think that in the films I make the process of identification has to be double-headed. It must develop out of the narration, and also out of the narrator. I think that in *India Song* the identification is with me.

On thinking it over, yes, because the narrative remains as a ghostly presence haunting the imagination. One has the feeling of being got at, of having listened to someone. And that someone isn't Anne-Marie Stretter.

It's not like a story you're being told, it's something else. You're being invited to

come to another place. And it's not just the place the narration tells about, it's also the place where the narration is happening. I think there was already an element of that in *Hiroshima*. Westerns and thrillers stand up less well to re-viewing than other films. So narrative no longer plays the role it once did, because hitherto the mainspring of commercial films has always been a good efficient story that gripped the spectator from beginning to end. As in Melville's films, for example. Now it's different.

Except that what Melville was doing was telling American stories in a strong French accent. What about Bresson, though?

He narrates. We all do. You can't help it. I'm crazy about *Au Hasard Balthazar* and especially *Pickpocket*. But above all I love Dreyer.

To return to *India Song*, why this particular feeling about India and Indo-China?

I was born in Indo-China, and in fact my third novel, *Barrage contre le Pacifique*, was set there. And then I went on to ... what? ... I don't remember. But you know, Anne-Marie Stretter already figured in *Moderato Cantabile*. That femininity, the woman who looks at things. She was in *Hiroshima* too. When you see those two films they reveal a remarkable similarity: the two loves, the love for the Japanese which reflects the love for the German, and in *Moderato Cantabile*, the love for Chauvin which reflects the newspaper account of the murdered girl. From *Hiroshima* to *India Song*, rejection and frustration are the stake. Because the reflection simultaneously poses a fatal attraction and means that the love can never be lived. All these women are equally suicidal. For Lol V. Stein, too, one love blocks the other. Anne-Marie

Stretter's reasons for dying aren't personal; they are reasons that exist outside her. You can equally well say that it's the beggar woman who kills her. The sky, the monsoon, the heat, leprosy, love. With Anne Desbaresdes in *Moderato Cantabile*, it's more difficult to close in on her from the outside. The same is true of Lol V. Stein, but not of Anne-Marie Stretter. She doesn't personalise; she has an awareness of things not shared by the others; and hers is the most logical suicide. I said that at the Cannes press conference: that I saw something profoundly equitable about her death, in being able to compensate so perfectly for Calcutta. She is a sort of living surrogate, as though Calcutta secreted a deadly venom and she died poisoned by Calcutta. It's no accident that she dies in the Indian Ocean. It's logical. Anne-Marie Stretter dies, in fact, in full awareness of the horror.

Whereas the beggar woman dies in ignorance ...

... but absolutely untouched, in total innocence. But can she die? A beggar woman? What isn't alive, doesn't die. The beggar woman's place ... where is it?

At what point did she come into your story?

Into my life? When I was twelve years old, that beggar woman came to our house at Bin Lonh with a baby and ran away during the night. My mother gave me the baby, which was dying. It was madness, she knew the baby was doomed. Why did she make me a present of that child? In *Le Barrage*, it's my mother ...

When all is said and done, I'm not a film-maker, not a maker of films.

Interview translated by Tom Milne

Grave-robbers used to be called Resurrection Men. It was at once a euphemism and a morbid lie. David Locke, played by Jack Nicholson in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*, tries to live out a similar lie, and it kills him. He comes back from his own staged death as little more than a ghost inhabiting another man's identity. He has tried for a premature exit from his fate, a way out of a personal disaster masquerading as success, but his rebirth is stillborn. Locke, a television journalist, is an international sleuth for news who has lost the scent of his own motives. When the movie opens, he finds himself in a red desert of despair and absurdity, repeatedly deserted by his guides in the middle of unknown directions. 'All right!' he screams, looking up hopelessly at a blank blue sky after his Land Rover has been partially buried in a sand dune, 'I don't care!' (the equivalent of Brando's 'Fucking God!' in the opening shot of *Last Tango in Paris*), and the camera pans indifferently from his slumped, groaning figure across the silent tracts of sand. When he returns to his desolate hotel room and finds that his near look-alike, one David Robertson, has dropped dead next-door, the corpse becomes both a symbol of Locke's own post-mortem state and a desperate chance for something at least resembling a second try at life. So he changes rooms, clothes, papers, only half aware of what he is doing at first, and walks away as another David with a new last name. Yet the rest of the film chronicles Locke's failure to escape from the deadlock of self implied by his true surname. As Robertson, his spasmodic ventures and frustrations from here on are merely delayed death throes.

Never before, perhaps, has Antonioni's ruthless austerity of style found a narrative that could so cunningly facilitate his art of spiritual depletion. At this midpoint of the 1970s, he has complemented Bertolucci's achievement in *Last Tango* to round out a central film myth for our time that is also a culmination of Antonioni's own career in the psychology of alienation. As David Locke puts himself aimlessly through another man's paces, gun-running with no weapons as it turns out, the spare nightmare narrative releases enormous symbolic potential. Nicholson plays Locke playing Robertson like an actor on location without a script, wondering why he is being paid so well and what the director might eventually have in mind, and the existential ironies are, more than we can always count upon in Antonioni, plausible and compelling. Keeping someone else's appointments even when no one shows is both an absurdist parable of modern dislocation and a psychological allegory of a split and evacuated self.

To unravel the strands of metaphor that attach to this single plot thread is an act of

Garrett Stewart

EXHUMED IDENTITY: Antonioni's Passenger to Nowhere

'I don't care!': Jack Nicholson in the desert



critical viewing on the part of the audience that the movie self-consciously instructs us in, by a complex method which can best be explored after an initial speculation about the screenplay. Liaisons between theory and practice in film-making are not known for intimacy or frequency, or else the contrasting legends of naïve directorial genius would not fare so well. Sophisticated criticism is for the most part, even more than in the other arts, an *ex post facto* activity. It is certainly rare for theoretical criticism to turn practical by its own example, but when Peter Wollen, who has offered such a lucid introduction to the semiology of film in his 1969 book, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, takes his place between Mark Peploe, who wrote the original story, and Antonioni himself in the screenplay credits for *The Passenger*, we are invited to guess at the critic's leverage on the artistic creation, at the author behind the *auteur*.

In the 1972 updated 'Conclusion' to his book, Wollen surveys the cinematic terrain since Godard, its ground-breaking experiments as well as its landmark accomplishments. In retrospect Godard is seen to have been engaged on 'an interrogation of the cinema rather than a fulfilment of its potential', as if his work and that of his immediate disciples were its own brand of structuralist self-criticism. Godard emerges as the first and greatest exponent of this cinema of self-reference, the first director systematically 'to conceive of making a film, not as communicating at all, but as producing a text in which the problems of film-making were themselves raised.'

Antonioni is not mentioned in this afterword, both because (one guesses) his major early work preceded Godard's innovations and had seemed until *The Passenger*, except for the questions of film epistemology tentatively broached by the photographic decipherings in *Blow Up*, to be largely unaffected by them, and also because the quality of his work had fallen off considerably in the six years since that film. But three years later now, with the memory of *Zabriskie Point* sufficiently faded, Wollen has worked with Antonioni on a project which so effortlessly includes the self-referential interrogation of the film-making process, in its full political implications, within the framework of a gripping human narrative that it is tempting to read *The Passenger* as an experimental essay in the 'fulfilment' for which Godard's cinematic cross-questioning mapped the way. At the very least, a consideration of the Godardian movie-within-the-movie technique leads us to the ironic centre of the film's intent.

Locke tells Robertson he is 'putting together a film on Africa', and when the footage he has shot is assembled after his supposed death as part of a commemorative documentary about Locke himself, the cinematic introversion has some of the same ironic effect which Welles achieved, along with the immediate informational purposes served by the flashback, with the 'News on the March' tribute to Citizen Kane following his opening death scene—the newsreel biography of a man who was himself a monger and falsifier of the news. At intervals in *The Passenger* we watch, along with his



'Putting together a film on Africa . . .': the reporter in search of a story

wife and producer, three examples of Locke's documentary film-making projected on a studio monitor, and they are incrementally revealing.

In the first, an interview with a plati-tudinous African leader, Locke records uncritically his manifest lies. 'Perhaps for once,' the ruler claims, 'the official terminology corresponds with the actual facts.' But the news intended to cement credibility is the announcement that there is no longer any opposition to his government, a lie read blandly on to the soundtrack of Locke's film which contradicts the entire guerrilla plot of Antonioni's. In a full flashback accompanying this isolated playback on the monitor, we see Locke and his wife Rachel arguing over the ethics of his profession, Rachel implying that his facile objectivity is an abdication of the journalist's responsibility. We have already learned from Locke's producer in a TV interview that Locke was born in England and educated in America, an uprootedness that is offered as an explanation for his special 'perspective', his admirable 'detachment'—exactly the distance from events which his wife resents.

Wollen has suggested in the conclusion to *Signs and Meaning* that when Godard puts film itself to the test in his movies, questioning its formulas and assailing the very limits of its form, this reflexive investigation and critique is 'as political an aspect of Godard's cinema as the overtly political debate and quotation which also take place in it. For it is precisely by making things "difficult" for the spectator . . . that Godard compels the spectator to question himself about how he looks at film, whether as a passive consumer and judge outside the work, accepting the code chosen by the director, or whether within the work as a participant in a dialogue.' Rachel couches her reservations in this very idiom: 'You involve yourself in real situations, but you've got no real dialogue.' Locke is a passive spectator, trapped now in the 'codes' he has too long taken for granted, and the same structuralist language appears, with further hints of Wollen's influence on the dialogue, when Locke tells Robertson,

in despair of change as a possibility during a flashback conversation, that 'We translate every experience into the same old codes.'

This sort of pungent abstraction—and there is arguably far too much of it in the script—has its own problems as 'real dialogue', but if it doesn't quite work, at least it serves, signalling a number of the film's important preoccupations. When Locke makes his mad escape into Robertson's identity, he has merely locked himself into another vicious circle—expropriating a new set of codes, yes, but without any hope of deciphering them. We are moving here within the true political centre of Antonioni's film, which goes deeper than local allegiance and vague revolutionary sympathies to the question of critical vision itself, a matter not so much of partisanship as of subjective participation. Locke wants it second-hand through Robertson, who still had the power to believe. The evasion is fatal.

Expertly designed to symbolise this fatality, a brief stretch of seemingly expendable conversation looms into subversive relevance as a transition to the next section of film-within-the-film. An unexplained quick cut takes us from an old man in the Umbraculo at Barcelona about to tell Locke 'the story of my life' to a frightening scene, shot through an eerie blue filter, of an African public ceremony that turns out, as predicted by a glimpse of a waiting coffin, to be a political execution: the end of another life story unknown to us. The scene has the aura and awe of a political martyrdom, but the hope of revolutionary change has in a way been undermined by the old man's preceding speech. Children are playing in the background, as in so many of the film's locales—including Locke's eventual death scene—and the old man is hardly cheered by this vision of new generations: 'Other people look at the children, and they all imagine a new world, but I see the same old tragedy begin again. It's boring.' He is in fact telling Locke the story of Locke's own life, and of his failed chance for a new existence as Robertson—just as the intercut film of the execution

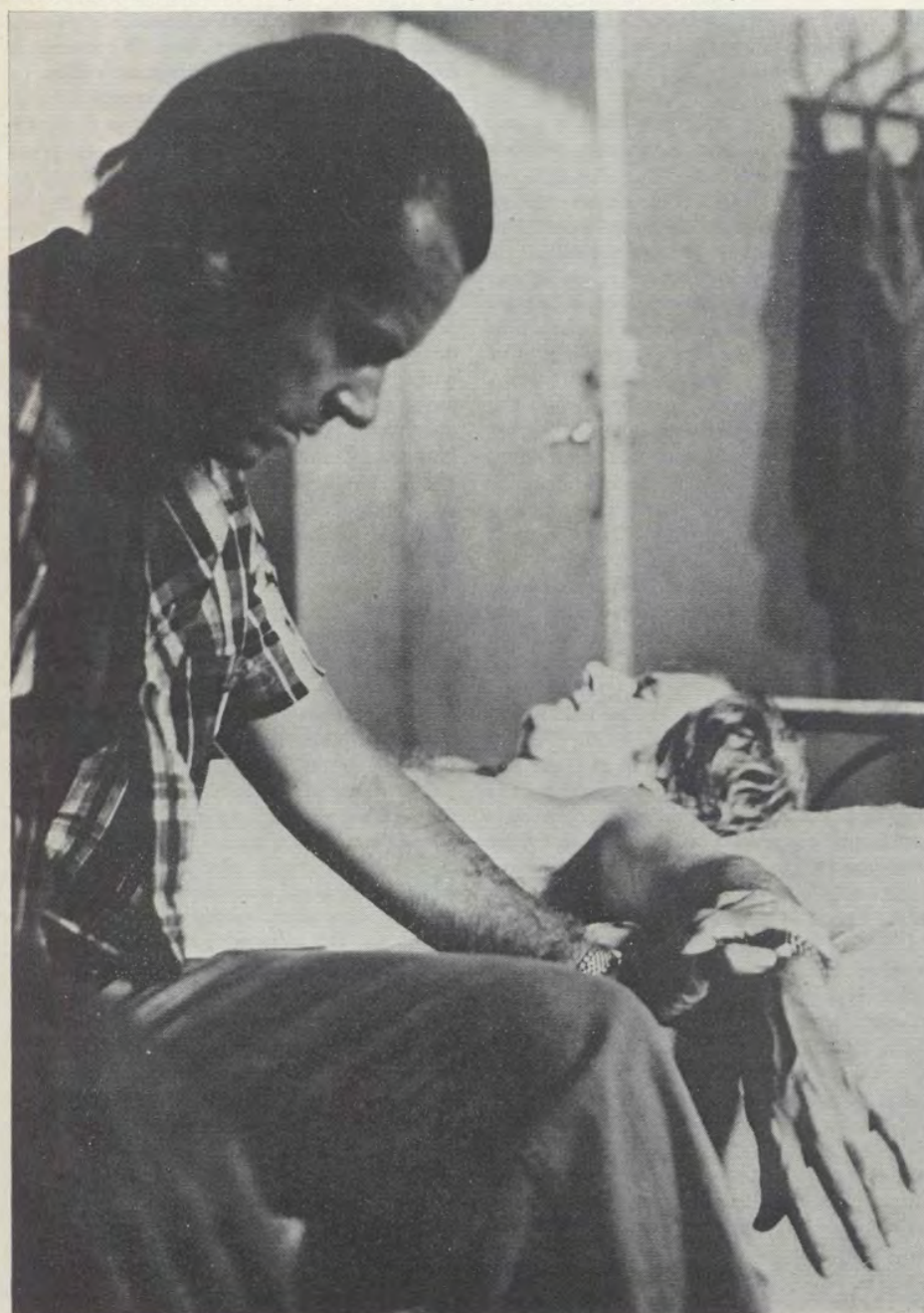
does in its own gruesome allegory of multiple death and hopeless revival. When fired on, the bound prisoner goes limp and motionless. A telephoto shot zooms in on his slumped head and torso, the grainy texture of the magnified shot suggesting in its apparent corrosion the very decomposition of death itself. Suddenly the presumed corpse is fired on again, opens its left eye and lifts its arms in a spasm of last life and apparent supplication, and is blasted a third time, as Antonioni's camera pulls back to reveal the scene as another bit of Locke's own footage being run on the studio monitor, struck dead now in a permanent freeze—mortality as the ultimate stop-action image.

Located strategically, this segment of Locke's film-making also has the impact of symbolic autobiography, and Rachel's repulsion from it in the studio simply emphasises the point. To complete the internal reflection of this film-within-the-film pattern, there is a third explicit sequence in which an eloquently spoken witch doctor, while being interviewed, turns the camera

around on Locke, whose questions are said to be more revealing about himself than any answers could be about his subject. The would-be 'objective' camera becomes a disconcerting mirror. We have been watching a movie made by Antonioni which has suddenly become a documentary movie made by and about the documentary movie-maker himself. The concentricity has real Godardian bite, and it is the only footage Rachel Locke wants to see replayed.

The psychology of mirroring, of inverted voyeurism, lurks beneath the narrative logic of the entire film. The sacrificial victim who, during his political execution, comes back to life momentarily only to be shot dead may be a symbolic mirror image of Locke, but the central 'double' is of course the man who shares Locke's first name and his features, David Robertson, the film's tragedy turning on the fact that no amount of willing can make him a genuine alter ego. When he is first found dead, Locke does not merely give up his own name to the corpse as a way out, but assumes the identity of the dead man.

Locke and Robertson: '... as if he were discovering the dead truth about himself'



The plot bears out the suicidal implications of this escapist gambit in the final assassination. Pretending to have died as Locke, the protagonist ends up being killed as Robertson, becoming once again a corpse on a bed in a dreary hotel.

The Passenger draws much of its narrative strength from the most ambitious and extended use of the doppelgänger motif in recent film. Brando and his wife's lover are robed and framed as visible counter-selves in an ingenious, witty scene in *Last Tango*, but it is even more interesting to compare what Antonioni makes of this pattern with a brief but equally brilliant deployment of it in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*.^{*} The detective, Philip Marlowe, is constantly giving out false names for himself, and at one point this running gimmick coincides with a parody of death and rebirth as a new anonymous self. Chasing Mrs. Wade, he is run down by a car and rushed away in an ambulance. The camera cuts to a shot of a figure mummified in bandages in a sterile hospital room, an Invisible Man who we can only assume is Marlowe. Instead, in far better shape, Marlowe occupies another bed in the same room, and says to a nurse on his way out, referring to the human bandage next to him, 'This is Mr. Marlowe right here. Take care of him. He's an important man.' He thus palms off his identity on a featureless double in order to leave the hospital without any trace, a mock rebirth from what we had been led to think was a near-fatal accident. He tells the Invisible Man that 'It don't hurt to die,' and for Marlowe, symbolically, it doesn't.

For Locke, on the other hand, the act of changing identities with the dead man by dragging the corpse into his own room was an extreme physical exertion that portrayed on the surface, in sweat and exhaustion, the ordeal within. Marlowe can take liberties with his name because he knows inside who he is. In becoming Robertson, by contrast, Locke hopes vainly to find out. With the close-up of Locke bending over his approximate mirror image, face to face with his own fate in an ultimate shock of recognition—played by Nicholson with such greedy curiosity—Antonioni has bestowed on film history a cinematic primal scene. It becomes an archetypal confrontation with a blurred likeness of the self as a death mask in flesh, with Locke studying every lifeless feature of his double's face as if he were discovering the dead truth about himself.

Even the manner of Robertson's death suggests that this identity transplant, this inhabiting of the life and unknown motives of the dead double, is in fact a symbolic suicide. Robertson's heart attack, like Locke's subsequent departure from identity, is self-induced. Indeed, Locke drinks with Robertson after the latter admits that it is dangerous for his heart condition—the virtual suicide abetted by the inheritor of his corpse. Taking possession, too, of Robertson's now meaningless date book, Locke's new life becomes in abject fact what it had always been, a deadening enigmatic quest for some kind of explanatory clues to its own purposes. In the elaborate trek

^{*}Since I first drafted this essay, Jonathan Rosenbaum's article on Altman appeared in the Spring 1975 *SIGHT AND SOUND*, where he discusses the 'dormant doppelgänger' in this scene from a somewhat different perspective.

across Europe, from London to Munich to Barcelona, we therefore feel ourselves in the presence of the film's title character long before we meet the unnamed girl who will join him about halfway through his journey.

Penelope Gilliatt, in her *New Yorker* review, mentioned that the film was originally to be called *The Reporter*, and that the change indicates Antonioni's emphasis on the girl as the 'key figure'. But surely the director of such films as *The Eclipse* and *The Red Desert* should be suspected of another allegorical designation, our best guess being that the reworked title reflects a decision to emphasise, not the theme of objective versus subjective reporting—the whole question of vision and epistemology already sufficiently developed through cinematic self-references—but instead, by a neat ambiguity, the notion that Locke is his own passenger in a transit out of self, along for another man's ride that leads literally to a dead end. Assumed identity is based on false assumptions about the nature of self-determination, which nothing the girl's optimism and commitment can do will set right. 'I used to be someone else,' Locke tells her in their first conversation, 'but I traded him in.' It is a bad bargain, and Locke, living on borrowed time (and wearing Robertson's wristwatch), waits patiently for fate to foreclose.

To whatever extent her role lays claim to the title, what part does the girl play in Locke's trial by alternative self? She is, for one thing, a student of architecture in a film whose essential interiors tend to be bleached, sterile cubicles and whose sun-baked landscapes towards the end are dominated by bone-white, rectangular shapes that blatantly entomb human life. Within and against the arid architectural confines which characterise all Antonioni's films, men and women often seem arbitrarily, almost accidentally framed by the camera, the skewed metaphysics of composition giving primacy to the non-human lines and spaces. Yet the girl stands for life, fitfully reached out for, and her artistic inclinations naturally draw her to the furious vitalism and organic lunacy of Gaudi's buildings, the film's visual alternative to the stark geometries of setting elsewhere, especially in the echoing death scenes early and late. It is in a Gaudi building that Locke spots her for a second time, seated on a bench at screen left, hunched over a book—just as she had been when he noticed her in a London park. We of course recognise her too, even the first time, as the actress Maria Schneider from *Last Tango in Paris*. The wry delicacy of the performance is new, but the perfect continuity in casting guarantees *Last Tango* a place in the subtext of cinematic allusion in *The Passenger*. In both films the Schneider character brings body and soul, and no name, to the rescue of an equally anonymous middle-aged man marking time on the brink of a final despair. The cross-referencing to Bertolucci's masterpiece is inevitable, and runs deep.

In many ways the two films are divergent renditions of a similar central myth. Paul, the Brando character in *Last Tango*, utterly at the end of his rope, tries to haul himself back to life on the tenuous cords of sex and affection thrown out to him by a girl whose name he refuses to learn. Finally,

when she can stand the strain no longer, she lets go, yet paradoxically Paul gets what he wants—a way out. Appearing just before the advent of *Last Tango*, Wollen's 1972 afterword to *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* seems to locate Bertolucci among the post-Godardian directors who 'have tended to retreat from the adventurousness of their own early "Godardian" work'; but *Last Tango*, with its full-scale movie-within-the-movie counterplot, immediately exempts itself from this judgment. Bertolucci carries Godard's habit of cinematic self-reference to its logical extreme by dividing his film in half across an unbridgeable crevasse of illusion, of movie fictionality. The cross-cutting of scenes between Paul and Jeanne alone together with those of her fiancé's film about her, the tepid, sentimental 'Portrait of a Girl', is a cinematic undercutting. It casts doubts on



'Last Tango in Paris': Marlon Brando

the honesty and reality of both halves of the action and prepares us for the cinematic allusions in the climactic death scene, which, alongside the murder scene in *The Passenger*, ranks among the screen's finest achievements in this vein, with every resource of film's connotative language called into play.

When Paul finally catches up with Jeanne at her mother's apartment, he announces that 'This is the title shot, baby. We're going all the way.' The three-way pun on 'shot' sounds his death knell. We have learned that Paul has been, among other things, a boxer, and this will be the semi-professional bout that determines the victor in their war of wills, a 'shot' at the 'title' in this sense—as well as the last tango that gives the film its name. When Jeanne fires her father's pistol at him the moment he finally asks to know her name, what we hear exploding is in another sense the title shot. In the preceding scene at the tango ballroom, the head of the jury tries to get Paul and Jeanne off the floor, yelling furiously: 'This isn't love. It's a contest. Love has nothing to do with it. If you want love, go to the movies.' The cinematic reference, of course, doubles back on itself, for Paul and Jeanne are characters in a movie about love as a contest, and their next and last confrontation will be a dance of death and a fight to the finish, the fatal entanglement of the film's title, the tango that is both a sexual duet and a mortal duel.

One of Brando's inspired improvisations is to chew gum during this last scene, and to take it out just before the moment of death, sticking it with a classic bad boy's defiance under the railing of the balcony. He has wandered there after the shot, mumbling, in a parody of generational

immortality, 'Our children. Our children. Will remember.' The camera holds on his face as he sinks into unconsciousness. It then cuts to a reversed subjective shot—itsself held like Brando's own fixed, glazed stare—of an ordinary blue-grey cityscape, bled of those feverish crimson and gold tones in which exterior shots of Paris had so often been flushed and suffused during the film, and then mirrored by open windows into the interior of the lovers' private world. Just as we begin to suspect that the image of the city has frozen to a still, the camera seems to come to, as if only now recovering from the passing of Paul's vision, and dollies back from its station on the balcony to reveal the foetal hump that had been the hero seconds before.

The bitter objectivity of the camera's eye is much like that at the close of *The Passenger*, the tragedy mitigated in both cases by the symbolic overtones of willed death. Over the corpse of his wife, Brando had promised that he would kill himself too, 'if I knew how, I just don't know. I need to find a way.' He sees in her deadly repose his own ultimate release, as Nicholson does over his double, and the rest of each film—despite the calm and happiness which Maria Schneider brings, by bringing nothing but herself, to both men—is a search for the best way out. *Last Tango in Paris*, therefore, can be felt to end on a stroke of desperate luck for its weary protagonist. What the camera shows us from both the inside and out, in its locked, wide-eyed gaze, records the departing consciousness of the hero with that blend of shock and indifference and relief which death surrenders him to. The intercut last tableaux, Paul's bemused stare and his terminal glimpse of the world, have a strange, sarcophagal power of image that conveys with astonishing directness a dumbstruck peace.

The meticulously prepared finish of *The Passenger* rejects this half-subjective interior dimension in its imagery with chilling finality. Anything like the partial first-person perspective of *Last Tango's* death scene would be redundant, and two hours overdue. Locke, too, needed 'to find a way' of ending his pain, yet for a man who has undertaken the funeral of his own identity, physical death can have only the impact of a foregone conclusion. The girl wonders out loud, just after she has taken her passenger's seat in Locke's getaway car, exactly what he is running away from. He tells her to face backwards in the speeding car, and the camera pulls away and above her to frame two lines of receding trees in dramatic perspective, a purely visual image in answer to her question. As in the film's best moments, the spoken script capitulates to the camera's silent eloquence after, so to speak, setting up the shot. His answer might be simply: I am running away from everything you see there, from reality. Especially from the reality behind, the past. That is the central implication. Or more specifically yet—and here the temporal dimension of the film image is tacitly called upon—from the present as it converts instantaneously into the past, from time and succession. 'Wouldn't it be better if we could throw it all away, get rid of the past day by day,' he has said to Robertson; but the only way to stop the regress of present

into past is through death itself, the private and violent cancellation of linear time.

Here the girl inspects reality for Locke as an accumulating past, but soon she will have begun to insinuate her aesthetic response to the temporal world. When Locke and Robertson are shown together in flashback on the hotel verandah, looking out over the desert, Robertson remarks on the beauty of the landscape and Locke quietly demurs. The girl repeats Robertson's same words later—'Isn't it beautiful?'—after their car has broken down in some remote part of the Spanish landscape far off the main highway. It is the one instance of success, perhaps, in Locke's abortive metamorphosis that he can now feelingly reply, 'Yes, it's very beautiful.' His sensory life is momentarily in unison with hers, and he sees with her eyes—almost as if, for the first and last time, with those of the man whose name he has taken. But when the girl also hopes to convince him that he can try to act out, without feeling or understanding, a faith in Robertson's revolutionary cause, we know that things are falling apart.

As Locke begins an irreversible turning away from the world after arriving at his last stop, the ironically named Hotel de la Gloria, he must rely on the girl's eyes not just for imaginative vision but for simple sight. The imagery of seeing, a corollary of his photographic journalism, has here come to a symbolic head. Twice he asks her what she sees from the window of his room, while he lies numbly on the bed, and both times she describes the arbitrary sights and sounds of a preternaturally dusty landscape with figures. It is for him the last outpost of reality, and the combination of the atmosphere's dusty shroud and his second-hand vision of it seems to trigger his anecdote—an obvious autobiographical parable—about a man blind for forty years who suddenly regained his sight, only to be disgusted with 'how much dirt there was in the world' and to bow out of it by committing suicide. This unnamed victim of reality becomes the second and last of Locke's alter egos. The camera crawls up an electric cord on the wall as this story is winding down; it comes to rest and into focus on a floridly unrealistic Spanish landscape painting of a lake, lush vegetation, and a brightly coloured cluster of buildings—the shapes and pigments of a world blindly imagined in the mind's eye, not the dirty, dehydrated world of normal sight. At this point we hear Nicholson's monotone from the bed below: 'What in the hell are you doing here with me? You'd better go.'

The girl obeys him knowingly, and without her there to look out for him (in either sense) he goes to the window himself for one last glimpse of the faded world. He returns at once to his bed, his prone body framed so that it is decapitated to the left of the screen, and slowly turns his face to the wall, away from the barred aperture of the floor-to-ceiling window—beyond which the girl comes gradually and diagonally into our view, never again Locke's. As the exhausted anti-hero gives up the fight at last, the camera gives out with ominous deliberation on the external scene. Leaving Locke to his fate, it begins its impossibly slow, measured track towards the framed reality beyond the window, where human figures

and movements, whether inadvertent or fateful, are captured indiscriminately in the fixed field of vision. The camera floats over and past the oblivious figure on the bed, consigning him to a destiny that is closing in on him as methodically as the camera is deserting his worn consciousness for the objective world outside.

Andrew Sarris has written in *The Village Voice* that this final phase of the movie 'represents one of the great conjunctions of cinema as narrative and cinema as art object,' but what precisely (or even implicitly) does this bit of aesthetic narrative manage to 'represent'? When Sarris suggests that in these 'last seven spectacular minutes on the screen we do not see Nicholson in any active context, but we feel his vibrant presence even in his virtual absence,' he is, I think, in his testament to Nicholson, underestimating the finality of this mortal transition. By turning away at the last moment from the world of Robertson's mysterious timetables, Locke has finally given up the ghost along with the limbo in which it roamed. As a willed identity, Locke is absent even before his life is taken from him by the neatly dressed black assassin who arrives now by car to the far left of the window's delimited view and follows the girl's diagonal path back to the hotel.

As the inexorable camera continues to work its way with brilliant, unedited deliberation past Locke's spiritual corpse outward to the world from which his destruction now comes, it must eventually pass through the symbolic bars of the window, which it does as part of its continuous slow zoom soon after the fatal shot has been muffled by automobile noises. Just moments before this we have heard the ironic spluttering of trumpets, and now the last two bars spread away from the implacable camera as the siren of an arriving police car breaks the intervening silence after the shot. It is an oblique and bleakly fitting death scene very close in tone to the end of *Last Tango*, in which we sense Locke's off-screen murder as the epitome, to reverse Sarris' reading, of his 'virtual absence' throughout the film. Locke's wife, aware by now that he has switched passports with Robertson, arrives with the police, and the camera pivots to an exterior shot of the hotel, panning right until it can peer into Locke's bedroom through that same barred window. When his wife is asked by the police if she recognises the corpse, she says flatly, 'I never knew him,' and is free of him at last. Maria Schneider, the same girl who drones over and over at the end of *Last Tango*, 'I don't know who he is . . . I don't know his name,' is now asked if she recognises him, and the last word in the film is her simple and movingly disingenuous affirmative.

Richard Roud (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1975) wrote that this prolonged climactic sequence 'does not bear directly on the ideas of the film, or on its theme,' and further that 'Everything that happens between the time the camera begins to move and the time that it stops is about itself.' Yes, but it is about itself not only as colour and space and movement, in the way Roud suggests, but about itself also as film narrative. And this is in turn a controlling idea, a theme, for which the almost

hypnotic tracking shot does provide a symbolic climax; the heightened, mock-documentary realism of the excruciating long take is at once as coolly detached in spirit as Locke's own work (and thus a revenge upon him for his own failures as a film commentator) and as ironically probing as the best of Antonioni's. 'Haven't you noticed that Reporter and Revenger start with the same letter!' says Lemmy in Godard's *Alphaville*, and Antonioni's latest film could be an extended satiric gloss on this observation, in which retribution is entirely reflexive.

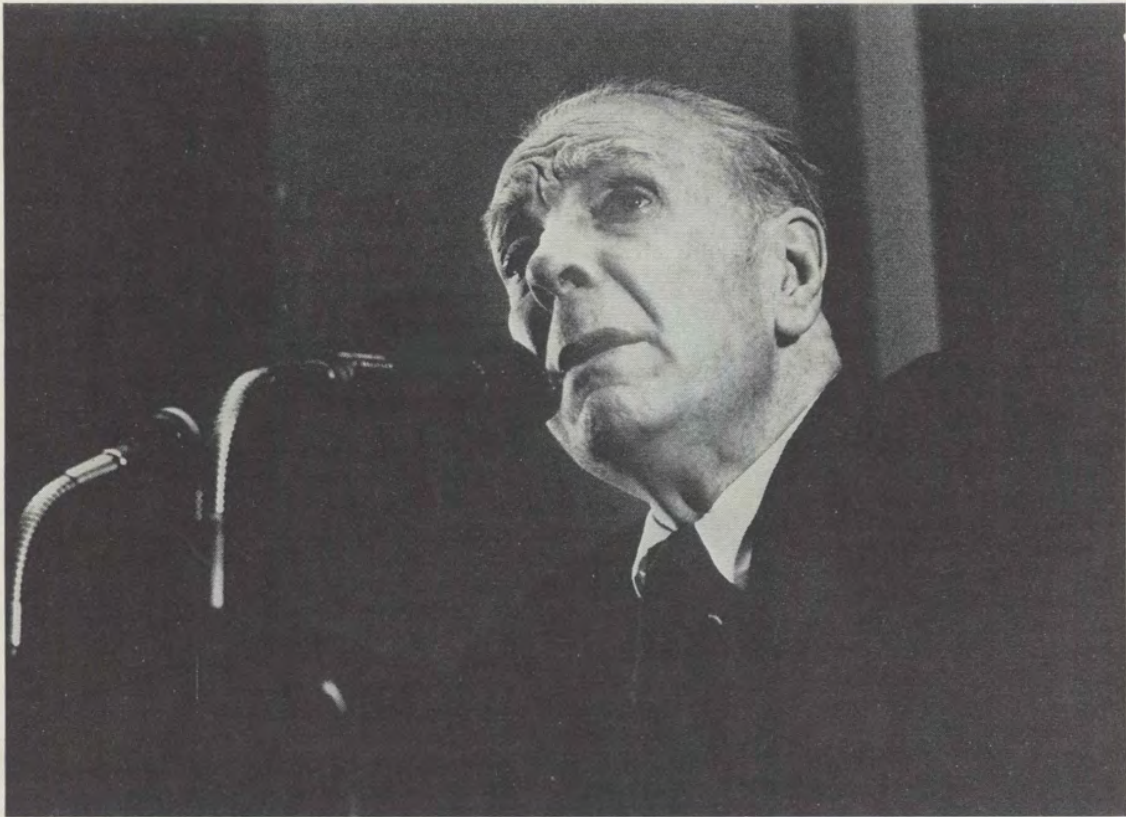
In an earlier meeting with the ambassador of the African nation where Locke is reported dead, his wife, having heard about David Robertson, lets drop in a single question the film's most resonant ambiguity: 'Did my husband know who he was?' Rachel's unnamed lover, annoyed by her sudden interest in her husband only after his death, tells her sarcastically at one point, 'Perhaps if you try hard enough you can reinvent him.' This is, of course, what Locke tries to do, to reinvent himself as David Robertson and find out by so doing, in both senses of the pronoun, who 'he' is or might become. The experiment is doomed, for he is and was a dead man, and this entire truncated biography of an anti-hero stands revealed as a self-conscious departure from a film tradition for which one of its scenarists is an important theoretical spokesman.

Writing about such American *auteurs* as Hawks and Ford, and their adaptations of the myth of the hero, Peter Wollen has suggested a common denominator in the recognition of mortality, the film heroes taking their terms of existence from the fact of death as terminus: 'For the hero, as an individual, death is an absolute limit which cannot be transcended; it renders the life which preceded it meaningless, absurd.' Heroic action must take place in suspended disbelief somewhere this side of such a limit, but Wollen has assisted Antonioni in a perverse 're-encoding' of the pattern whereby the narrative lifeline of their film circles back on itself in one long protracted death scene. Life itself, for this anti-hero, is travestied and excluded.

In the theatre where I saw *The Passenger*, its nondescript advertising poster happened to face across the lobby what might have been its own alter ego, the blurb for Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* with its cheering caption; 'The movie for everyone who has ever dreamed of a second chance.' So, in a monitory minor key, is *The Passenger*, where the obligatory copyright notice flashed at the end of the credits, about depicted 'events and characters' being 'entirely fictitious', is another fine coincidence. This bit of legalese can be retroactively absorbed into the film's matrix of self-reference, exonerating the script but indicting the lived fiction of Locke's second self. The disclaimer that 'any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely accidental' backfires upon the narrative to become the perfect epitaph for this post-mortem quest of a man neither alive nor convincingly dead, a passenger driven half-heartedly by another man's itinerary on a one-way journey going nowhere, whose only peace is a passing away.

BORGES on and in FILM

Edgardo Cozarinsky



Jorge Luis Borges. Photograph: Leonie Finlay

In 1935, in the prologue to *A Universal History of Infamy*, Jorge Luis Borges admitted that those first exercises in fiction derived from the cinema of von Sternberg. In 1940, the *Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (which he composed together with Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo, and which may be taken as a non-discursive manifesto, proceeding through examples, for the literary choices that their own practice would illustrate) devotes one of the seven lines of information about him to saying that 'he writes, in vain, screenplays . . .'

Borges' relationship with the cinema has been as labyrinthine and paradoxical as that of his characters with time. In a recent book* I have attempted an inventory, which cannot help but be provisional, of its many, even contradictory, aspects. At its centre, of course, are the reviews which Borges published between 1931 and 1944 in the literary magazine *Sur*. These deal with some particular films, and occasionally with aspects of film language. Those texts, however, are only the most explicit among the many references to the cinema scattered in that larger, splendidly fragmentary text, discontinuous only in its appearance, which Borges does not like to think of as his oeuvre. It is possible to recognise in that recurrence a series of attitudes towards the cinema, even ideas about all narrative practice, options dramatised in the way of writing a story, which are already implicit in Borges' treatment of cinema.

This is what I tried to point to in an opening essay; in the last section of the book I tracked down Borges' almost parodistic impact on film critics and film-makers

(coincident persons, often) who have quoted him, and on the films that have adapted his stories or translated his screenplays—less for the sake of erudition than for fun, more curious about the unpredictable results than worried by any scruple of fidelity. The

predictable result has been a book which does not incorporate these materials in a linear way, but rather respects their disparity, allowing them to irradiate from their common centre in several directions.

FILM IN BORGES

'Les écrivains ont toujours eu l'ambition de faire du cinéma sur la page blanche: de disposer tous les éléments et de laisser la pensée circuler de l'un à l'autre.'—Jean-Luc Godard, interviewed in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, October 1965.

Cinema (an idea of cinema, rather) recurs in Borges' writing, associated to the practice of narrative, even to the very possibility of attempting narrative. Films also appear as reading material, one among countless motives for reflection offered by the universe, and they illustrate the most varied subjects. The hilarity of a Buenos Aires audience at some scenes from *Hallelujah* and *Underworld* provokes a bitter remark in

**Borges y el cine*. Sur, Buenos Aires, 1975.

'Our Impossibilities' (an article dated 1931, included one year later in *Discussion* but omitted from the 1957 revised edition); von Sternberg allows Borges to test a hypothesis about the workings of any narrative ('The Postulation of Reality' and 'Narrative Art and Magic' in *Discussion*); Joan Crawford is one of the witnesses summoned by the second of these essays, as Miriam Hopkins is by *History of Infamy*; 'the impetuous film *Hallelujah*' is listed as one among many consequences of having imported blacks to America, in the opening enumeration of 'The Dread Redeemer Lazarus Morell' in *A Universal History of Infamy*; Lane, the bashful translator ('The Translators of the 1001 Nights', in *History of Eternity*), is compared to the then rigid Hollywood censorship.

By the late 1920s and the 1930s, the mere reproduction of appearances was for Borges an incalculable enrichment of life through cinema, perhaps because in those appearances, even fictive (especially because fictive?), he recognised the signs of an ampler context. In a digression from 'The Other Whitman' (an article dated 1929, but omitted when *Discussion* was reissued), Borges refers to the lack of communication between the inhabitants of 'the diverse Americas' and ventures the hope that this is something which 'the cinema, with its immediate showing of destinies and its no less immediate showing of wills, tends to dissipate.' Any attempt at a catalogue could grow effortlessly. What matters is to watch films working as a habit for the young Borges, an accessible repertoire of references, which he frequented as much as the *Encyclopædia Britannica* or the unprinted reality.

The image of literature (or history, or philosophy) as one comprehensive text, scattered in countless, even contradictory fragments, each of which on its own does not represent it, nor all together exhaust it—this is, too, the image conveyed by the cinema: with greater ease than those other distinguished disciplines, it took shape in the films visited and quoted by Borges, with growing infrequency after 1940; a cinema that, *pace* Eisenstein and Welles, could yet appear as an art unfettered by too many proper names. It was, mostly, a practice almost free of bibliographies and academies. Allardyce Nicoll, whose book *Film and Theatre* (1936) is dismissed by Borges as an exercise in pedantry, is described as someone 'well-tried in libraries, well-read in card-files, definitive in catalogues' and also 'almost illiterate in box-offices . . .'

This was the arena where many obscure story-tellers practised that 'varied modulation of a few metaphors' ('Pascal's Sphere', *Other Inquisitions*) whose record may be the world's history. 'I think nowadays, while literary men seem to have neglected their epic duties, the epic has been saved for us, strangely enough, by the Westerns . . .' 'During this century . . . the epic tradition has been saved for the world by, of all places, Hollywood' (Borges, interviewed by Ronald Christ in *The Paris Review* 40, Winter-Spring 1967).

Hollywood may have pieced together a film text, both craftsmanlike and industrialised, which stands comparison with the ancient sagas, but Borges' predilection for it is, alas, sophisticated. To belittle the

films built by von Sternberg around Dietrich, he praises Sternberg's previous action movies, and in the interview already quoted he recalls that 'when I saw the first gangster films of von Sternberg I remember that when there was anything epic about them—I mean Chicago gangsters dying bravely—well, I felt that my eyes were full of tears.' But von Sternberg was not Wellman or Hawks or Walsh, figures who could more believably play a film equivalent to the skald. Borges feels attracted by von Sternberg's stylisation of characters, milieux and conventions whose customary violence is often less elliptical, less ironical than in films like *Underworld* or *The Docks of New York*.

It is not arbitrary that Sternberg is the only director assiduously mentioned by Borges, and that his name should appear in the early studies of narrative method included in *Discussion*, as well as in the 1935 prologue to *A Universal History of Infamy*, a book that turns the invocation to epic

History of Infamy). To falsify, to distort—verbs that shock with criminal connotations, but which correspond, nevertheless, to every stage in a story's (unending) shaping: traditional yarn, gossip, the project for a novel that gradually becomes a written novel, texts which all proceed by repetition and modification of annihilated pretexts. What Borges calls 'ambiguous exercises' in the preface quoted above are particularly revealing because they reject the invention of anecdote and explore, rather, the different possibilities, even the excluding ones, of story-telling. To overcome his declared timidity, Borges conceals and points to his own devices.

At the time of their composition, he considered that these exercises derived from 'my rereadings of Stevenson and Chesterton, also from Sternberg's early films, perhaps from a certain biography of Evaristo Carriego. They indulge in certain tricks: random enumerations, sudden shifts of continuity, the reduction of a man's whole



Clive Brook in 'Underworld': for Borges, Sternberg was an acknowledged influence

into a feat of verbal legerdemain. In the 1954 prologue for the book's revised edition, Borges writes about it: 'Scaffolds and pirates inhabit it, and the word "infamy" thunders from the title, but behind such loudness there is nothing. The book is nothing but appearance, a surface of images, and for that very reason it may give some delight.' Movies are, of course, that surface of images, and there is nothing to be found behind the words of any literary work; but to accept, and to advertise, that a piece of writing operates against the referential function of language is as sceptical and cultivated a gesture as the nostalgia for the epic, or the disdain for romantic individualism.

At a twenty year distance, Borges proclaimed that his first stories were 'the irresponsible game of a shy young man who did not dare write a story and amused himself by falsifying and distorting (perhaps without any aesthetic justification) other people's tales' (1954 preface to *A Universal*

life to two or three scenes. (A similar pre-occupation with visual aims shapes the story 'Streetcorner Man'.) They are not, they do not try to be, psychological' (preface to the first edition). This enumeration of sources and procedures, instead, is not random. Its examples may define the context Borges kept in mind for his idea of cinema.

In Stevenson, even in Chesterton, Borges admires a capacity for verbal mise-en-scène, something that Stevenson called 'the plastic part of literature' in 'A Gossip on Romance' (*Memories and Portraits*, 1887): 'The threads of a story come from time to time together and make a picture in the web; the characters fall from time to time into some attitude to each other or to nature, which stamps the story home like an illustration. Crusoe recoiling from the footprint, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears, these are each culminating moments in the legend, and each has been

printed on the mind's eye for ever. Other things we may forget; we may forget the words, although perhaps it was ingenious and true; but these epoch-making scenes which put the last mark of truth upon a story and fill up, at one blow, our capacity for sympathetic pleasure, we so adopt into the very bosom of our mind that neither time nor tide can efface or weaken the impression. This, then, is the plastic part of literature: to embody character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye.'

The prizing of this capacity appears at a particular moment in the evolution of narrative practice in the second half of the nineteenth century—after the inauguration of a rigorous discipline by Flaubert, contemporary with James' early mastery of points of view and alternation between panoramic narrative and scenification, immediately before these resources were to become sacred in the later work of James himself, in the work of Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, of Joyce at the time of 'The Dead'. It is the tradition that, once stipulated by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*, supported the best work accomplished by the 'new criticism' in the field of fiction, before languishing academically and slowly fading away.

Borges speaks of those verbal, defining and definitive images as 'circumstantial invention' ('The Postulation of Reality', *Discussion*), third, most difficult and effective among the novelist's methods for imposing his palpable authority upon the reader. He illustrates the point, magnanimously, with a quotation from a pompous Argentine novel he otherwise cares little for (Enrique Larreta's *The Glory of Don Ramiro*), and adds: 'I have quoted a brief, linear example, but I know of large works (Wells' severely imaginative novels, Defoe's exasperatingly lifelike ones) that frequent no other procedure than the development or recording of laconic observations with far-reaching implications. I believe the same of the film novels of Josef von Sternberg, also made of significant moments. It is an admirable and difficult method, but its general applicability makes it less strictly literary than the other two.'

Of what use can the novelist's tools be to a writer whose intellectual habits, whose work upon language predispose to the composition of brief, intense texts, intolerant of the necessary prolixities of the novel? Less ascetic than Valéry, Borges practised his mistrust of the novel, and his impatience at sheer extension is well known: 'It is a painstaking and impoverishing foolishness to compose large books, to expound in five hundred pages an idea whose perfect oral exposition takes a few minutes. A better policy is to make believe those books already exist and to offer an abridgement, a commentary' (prologue to *The Garden of Forking Paths*). This insouciance banishes the very possibility of trying a genre which, to illustrate character, to grade its episodes, requires a leisurely orchestration of circumstances and particulars, of minute information. Borges would say of Hawthorne that his talents were better suited to the short story than to the novel because he would rather start from situations, not from characters: 'Perhaps undeliberately, Haw-

thorne first imagined a situation and then looked for characters to embody it. I am not a novelist but I suspect no novelist ever proceeded like that . . . Such a method may obtain, or allow, admirable short stories because in them, on account of their own brevity, the plot is more visible than the actors, but never admirable novels, where the overall pattern (if any) is only visible at the end, and where just one ill-conceived character may infect with unreality those around him' ('Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Other Inquisitions*).

Is it possible, instead of finding 'privileged moments' in the narrative flow, to start from an ordering of those 'visions' and omit the connective tissue that should hold them together? And those images, memorable in a story told at a certain length—would they, in isolation, be able to project phantasmally the omitted narrative supposed to link them? *Evaristo Carriego* proposes an answer.

This book, written in 1930, is only comparable to Nabokov's *Gogol* as an instance of the complete absorption of one writer's figure by another, though the minor stature of Carriego makes the process more evident. It is a particular instance of 'literary biography' which marks Borges' first attempt at that fiction to which, he felt, a particular shyness denied him access, discreet 'distortion and falsification' of another history which is its mere pretext. Several times Borges writes down his hesitations, the obstacles encountered in the process of composing the book. In the first chapter, 'Palermo in Buenos Aires', after stating that 'the unceasing, intermingled style of reality, punctuated by ironies, surprises, intimations as strange as surprises, may only be recaptured by the novel, out of place here,' he ventures: 'To recapture that almost immobile prehistory would suppose weaving, foolishly, a chronicle of infinitesimal processes (. . .) The most direct, according to the cinematographic procedure, would be to propose a continuity of discontinuous figures . . .' And he goes on to propose his own montage of 'laconic observations with far-reaching implications' which would bring about the atmosphere of the Palermo neighbourhood at the time of Carriego's birth.

Between these examples a relationship becomes apparent. Stevenson's remarks as a reader lend support to his method. Borges takes them up and recognises their application in the films of von Sternberg. Then, in an early book where he hesitates in the face of that same fiction whose instruments he is borrowing, he tries for the magic of bringing about an ampler reality by naming memorable fragments that may postulate it. Films suggest a possibility of linking these moments by a syntax less discursive than the verbal one. It is there that what may be called a notion of montage appears, operating on texts made of words. That 'cinematographic procedure', that 'continuity of discontinuous figures' will be the declared method in the stories of *A Universal History of Infamy*. 'History (which proceeds, like certain film directors, by a series of abrupt images) now proposes the image of a danger-filled saloon . . .' Thus opens one of the chapters dividing, and making up, 'The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan'.

There is a moment, which might be

placed between *Evaristo Carriego* and the composition of the short story 'Street-corner Man', Borges' first, when Stevenson and von Sternberg thrilled him in the same way, when it seemed possible to grant the neighbourhood of Palermo and its turn of the century tough guys a verbal treatment equivalent to that bestowed by *Underworld* on Chicago and its gangsters. Impatient with the servitudes that the novel seemed to impose on the practice of fiction, Borges gives it a try by means of a lucid magic. It matters less whether he was guided by the possibilities that the cinema discovered for him in the narrative of his favourite authors, or that these allowed him to recognise in movies.

BORGES IN FILM

' . . . A book whose material may be everything for everybody . . . because it is open to almost inexhaustible repetitions, versions, perversions'—
Borges: 'Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz', *The Aleph*.

Even though some isolated texts by Borges had been published by literary magazines in the United States, in England and France, his name and his work only inscribe themselves in a non-Latin American intellectual context after the French translation of his books: *Fictions*, 1951; *Labyrinthes*, 1953; *Enquêtes*, 1957; *Histoire de l'Infamie. Histoire de l'Eternité*, 1958. Quotations, the mention of a name, the allusion to a title, slowly make their way until they find a place in that territory of shared references traditionally called literary culture. This process, of course, immediately raised its well-groomed head in French film criticism. Even when concerned with the most commercialised and obscure movies, the Paris trenches battled in terms of a declared cultural struggle. Whether *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Positif* or *Présence du Cinéma*, factions of the early 1960s, they all conducted their guerrilla warfare in assiduous frequentation of Borges, who would become the password, key to a literary space, start of a dizzying connotative chain that would carry a film, any film, in its own reference system.

Alain Robbe-Grillet had reviewed Adolfo Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel* in its French translation (*Critique* 69, February 1953), and in so doing had analysed Borges' preface to the novel. In *Cahiers du Cinéma* 123, September 1961, Robbe-Grillet, interviewed with Resnais by André S. Labarthe and Jacques Rivette about *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, says that Claude Ollier telephoned him after a screening of the film to gasp, 'But it is *The Invention of Morel*!' The same issue of *Cahiers* contained a review of the film by François Weyergans, who also pointed to the relationship between Bioy Casares' novel and the film; while Ollier, in what may have been the best study of the film to appear at the time of its release, also drew the parallel in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, October–November 1962. Borges, so far appearing in the wake of Bioy Casares, stepped to the forefront in Robert Benayoun's review of



Borgesian perspectives: 'L'Année Dernière à Marienbad'; Giulio Brogi and Alida Valli in 'The Spider's Stratagem'

Marienbad (*Positif* 44, March 1962), and later would introduce with an epigraph from 'The Garden of Forking Paths' Roy Armes' chapter on the film in his book *The Cinema of Alain Resnais*, 1968.

Even more involved, though, is the case of *Paris Nous Appartient*. Suzanne Schiffman, the invaluable collaborator of Truffaut, Rivette and Godard, was reading *Enquêtes* during the shooting; Rivette, who at that time had not read Borges, thought that the title was appropriate and put the book, next to Shakespeare, on the heroine's bedside table. Only after the critics drew the parallel between his film and Borges did Rivette read him, and in the middle sixties he undertook a never to be completed adaptation of 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero' (to be turned by Bertolucci, a few years later, into *The Spider's Stratagem*, scripted, curiously enough, by two writers also associated with Rivette, Eduardo De

Gregorio and Marilù Parolini). But already in an article published before the delayed release of *Paris Nous Appartient* (by Paul Thirard in *Positif*, July-August 1960), its elusive story-line was linked to 'The Approach to Almotasim' through an involved, Borgesian play of literary references which included Benjamin Fondane's review (in *Europe*) of a non-existent novel which is obviously the one invented by Borges for his story. It was Claude Ollier, again, who would develop from the association of *Paris Nous Appartient* and Borges' work two very different but equally illuminating texts—his review, under the title 'Finesse et Géométrie', in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, February 1962, and the essay 'Thème du Texte et du Complot' in his volume *Navettes*, 1967.

Ollier, of course, was not alone in bringing Borges into the picture. Michel Delahaye did so too in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 128, February 1962. His article, 'L'Idée

maîtresse ou le complot sans maître', may be the first impulse in a series of associations between Borges and Rivette which was to develop an incalculable progeny. In *Movie* 2, September 1962, Paul Mayersberg put 'The Library in Babel' in the place of 'The Lottery of Babylon', the story mentioned by Delahaye. (Curiously enough, both critics, so quick to detect Borges' shadow, pay no attention to a more telling literary reference—the name of the *metteur en scène* in the film is Lenz.) This series was to find a comedy footnote when Raymond Durgnat, in *Nouvelle Vague: The First Decade*, 1963, picks up Borges' name and Mayersberg's mention of 'The Library in Babel' with the apparent conviction that it is a science fiction novel.

Time, and of course Cammell and Roeg's *Performance*, would make of such recondite erudition a more accessible patrimony. If in 1962 *Movie* was flaunting its French sources by quoting Borges, while *SIGHT AND SOUND* (in a review by Robert Vas in the winter 1961-62 issue) sported a more conservative literary analogy (Kafka), one decade later, in the spring 1971 issue, Borges is all over *SIGHT AND SOUND*—in a brief interview with Donald Cammell and in a study of *Performance* by Philip French. It is interesting, though, to ascertain the different degrees of familiarity on the part of the author, or supposed in the reader. French writes 'the septuagenarian Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges', while Jan Dawson (in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1971) calls him, plainly, Borges... Both Rivette and Roeg would have to bear Borges' long shadow upon their future work, and critics of *Out One Spectre* and *Don't Look Now* have not been shy of recognising it. In the *New Yorker* review of *Don't Look Now* by Pauline Kael, Borges' name is mentioned seven times.

Already in 1963, *Cahiers* had reached a point of no return, as far as coquetry goes, when a review of Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* carried as title, without any explanation in the text which followed, 'Otras inquisiciones' (sic, in Spanish). *Présence du Cinéma* and *Positif*, on their own, were addicted to Borges to the point of using him as a pretext for their own internecine warfare. An article by Goffredo Fofi in *Positif* 58, February 1964, the first to attempt the study of Borges' relationship to cinema, was the subject of critical abuse by Jacques Lourcelles in a piece published in *Présence* 20, March-April 1964, which was aimed more clearly at the rival magazine than at the article itself. In the same issue of *Présence*, Lourcelles also flaunts his familiarity with Borges in an article on Samuel Fuller—title, epigraph and last paragraph quote, allude to or paraphrase the Master. And, in the last issue of the magazine (24-25, autumn 1967), the same writer attached a Borges epigraph to a review of the films of 1966, in which the modish production of the season was shunned. Borges, then, enrolled against 'new cinema'; Borges called on to explain it... The Roman magazine *Cinema & Film*, ideologically far apart from *Présence*, used to quote him often, whether in relation to Bergman, to Hitchcock, or even to Glauber Rocha.

More intriguing than the actual screen adaptations of Borges' stories, or the

rendering of the original screenplays written in collaboration with Bioy Casares*, is Borges' slow infiltration into several films, some of which have chosen to quote him, which may be related to the favourite notions at play in his literature. Fashion or history, on their own, would not explain how these quotations left the secluded pages of highbrow magazines to conquer films themselves. A circumstantial assemblage of causes and effects may explain, of course, why the work, or rather the aura of a writer's work, translated late and massively, should shine in all its splendid rarity, first for a criticism nourished on literature, prowling for exclusive prey; why then economic and political circumstances allowed some representatives of that criticism to embark on film-making, and how a cinema attempting new narrative approaches and language experiences would ask from its critics new instruments. Barely successive, already chain-dissolving around 1960, these phenomena weave their own figure in the carpet, and Rivette's placing of *Enquêtes* in a shot in *Paris Nous Appartient* may be read, retrospectively, like the gesture of the sorcerer's apprentice, full of innocent menace.

Such disparate film-makers as Godard, Resnais and Benayoun were to quote Borges, either in the form of texts (*Les Carabiniers*, *Paris n'existe pas*) or in more involved ways (the universal computer in *Alphaville* vomits, among other things,

fragments from 'A New Refutation of Time', while in a scene from *Je t'aime, je t'aime* a character corrects over the phone galley proofs which could only belong to *Evaristo Carriego*). The most recent item in the series may be Shuji Terayama's *Pastoral Hide and Seek*.

Labyrinths of time and space were supposed for a long time to be Borges' territory, but his recent readers (who are also readers of R. D. Laing and Gilles Deleuze) seem more sensitive to his central mistrust of the notion of authorship, more generally of identity. Before *Performance*, René Allio included a quotation from *The Book of Imaginary Beings* in *L'Une et l'Autre*, to explain the predicament of the film's Pirandellian heroine. For Carmelo Bene (in whose *Don Giovanni* the soundtrack renders the hypothetical original English of a key line from 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'), Borges is obviously a cultural luxury, one item among others in his one-man battle against his idea of Italian cultural provincialism. On a window-shopping scale, Borges also appears in Jean Eustache's *La Maman et la Putain*—a name quoted by Jean-Pierre Léaud, as Murnau's is, as the voices of Zarah Leander and Damia, or the Café de Flore and the restaurant at the Gare de Lyon, are convoked: hints of a taste, tokens of an attitude.

A crowning item in this glorified gossip column should record that in 1970, when Straub-Huillet's *Othon* was threatened with dubbing by Italian TV, their defence of the original soundtrack was expressed through Borges' 1945 text against dubbing, which they quoted extensively to support their contention that dubbing is a fascist device. (How RAI could have ignored, when they agreed partially to back the film, Straub's own militancy on behalf of direct sound is a bureaucratic mystery of its own.)

The risk of attempting a chart such as this is that of ending up with an inverted image of 'The Approach to Almatasim'—that of an unceasing, unending dispersion, starting from a once secret seed. Like the imprints of Tlön on this world, the isolated references to Borges seem quickly to establish a net of relationships, to propose an order, to sanction a system. ■

*'Emma Zunz' was filmed by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson in 1954, as *Días de odio*. Later, under its original title, the story was adapted into a forgettable medium-length French TV film, directed in 1969 by Alain Magrou. 'Street-corner Man' was filmed in 1962 by René Mujica (*Hombre de la esquina rosada*) and 'The Dead Man' in 1975 by Hector Olivera (*El Muerto*), both in Argentina. 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero' was, of course, the basis for Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*, 1969. Of the two original screenplays written by Borges and Bioy Casares, published in one volume in Argentina in 1955, *Los Orilleros* was filmed in 1975 by Ricardo Luna. Hugo Santiago's *Invasión* (Argentina, 1968-69) and *Les Autres* (France, 1974) were both written by the director together with Borges and Bioy Casares; the script of *Les Autres* has been published in France.

A scene from 'Les Autres', made by Hugo Santiago in France in 1974 from a script by Borges (who appears in the film), Bioy Casares and Santiago



U.S. TV: The Great Spin-off from page 27

season looks to be a film by Renée Taylor and Joseph Bologna: a remake of the 1942 *Woman of the Year*. We are finally even with where we were a third of a century ago.

But maybe not for long. It might just be a strange coincidence, but at the same time that television producers have come up with some programmes that attempt to deal intelligently with woman characters in relevant situations, television network executives in their infinite wisdom have decided on a programme of self-censorship which threatens to cut the heart out of these mildly topical shows. The networks, imagining that they were about to be called to account by the federal government for their wholesale traffic in raw violence, came up on their own last spring at the meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters (in Las Vegas, of all places) with a concept they call 'Family Time'. All programming between the hours of 7 and 9 p.m. is subject to the vague, undelineated and arbitrary strictures of this new twist in self-censorship.

The violence quotient has changed only slightly: action shows that weren't already scheduled after 9 p.m. have been moved there, creating a 'violence ghetto'. The unwritten code was never directed at toning down violence anyway (although there is some talk of murder and knifing quotas); the network executives, worried about profit margins and trying to serve the lowest common denominator, are more interested in censoring sex and language. Only four comedies (*Mary Tyler Moore*, *All in the Family*, and two other MTM and Tandem shows) are scheduled after 9 p.m. The others, including *Phyllis* and the short-lived *Fay*, which were originally designed to go much further than *Mary* and *Maude* into sexual politics, are subject to the Family Time provisions. 'Dear God,' it seems, is allowed as an expletive; 'Oh, God!' is not. *Phyllis* has had to replace the word 'virgin' with 'totally innocent'; and those with long memories will recall Otto Preminger's problems with *The Moon Is Blue* back in 1953. Needless to say, it's not petty changes in vocabulary that are damaging, but the effect of simply knowing that each script will be subject to this kind of arbitrary censorship. Writers don't even bother to suggest scripts which might otherwise have been shot as a matter of course.

The chances are that Family Time is simply so absurd in the year 1975 that it won't last very long. Network censors edit for an idealised puritanical lady in Dubuque; and the theory is that it doesn't matter if you can't please anyone so long as you don't offend a single viewer. But the audience, even in Dubuque, is more advanced than the networks would like to think. Last September on network television, when Jimmy Connors turned to his opponent Manuel Orantes after losing the final of the U.S. Open and exclaimed 'Shit, Manolo!' CBS received not a single complaint. The question remains, how long will it take CBS, ABC and NBC to catch up with their audiences. ■



AN INTERVIEW WITH

HASKELL WEXLER

Renée Epstein



'Brazil: a Report on Torture' (1971); 'Medium Cool' (1969)

Haskell Wexler has been one of the most talented and influential American cameramen of the last two decades. His string of credits includes *Stakeout on Dope Street* (1958), *The Savage Eye* (1959), *America, America* (1963), *The Best Man* (1964), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968). He was also photographic consultant on *American Graffiti* (1973). In 1969, he wrote, directed, produced and shot *Medium Cool*, which dealt with the involvement of a young television news cameraman in the situations his camera was recording—including the riots during the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968. *Medium Cool* remains Wexler's only feature as a director; but he has also directed or worked on a number of documentaries, including most recently *Brazil: a Report on Torture*, an interview with President Allende, *Interview with My Lai Veterans*, and, in 1974, *Introduction to the Enemy*. Haskell Wexler is at present photographing *Bound for Glory*, the story of Woody Guthrie, directed by Hal Ashby.

HASKELL WEXLER: 'I have rather complex feelings about film-making. Through instant replay, for example, which is the essence of the medium, it is possible to manipulate time. However, through this mechanical power, you lose a sense of immediacy, you alter the manner in which you perceptually relate to the world. I was on the beach yesterday and there was a young couple walking, hand in hand, by the shore. I looked at them and thought, "I cannot look at these people today as I looked at them when I was a young man. I see them behind a camera at seventy-two frames per second. I watch them in slow motion, following the movement of the woman's hair as she turns her head." I almost superimposed a coke bottle or Goodyear tyre as though I were shooting a commercial. We have expropriated so many of the private moments and sold them in the marketplace. And this is part of the corruption of the reproducible media. I know because I make commercials.

'I also am a film-maker. I use film-making as a way to explore life. It legitimatises my presence in interesting places at interesting moments. Whether the films are commercially shown is not the most important factor. I made a film for the farmers' union, years ago, which only the farmers saw. I made a film for the United Packinghouse Union in Chicago, and one for the United Electrical Workers Union. I shot a film on the returning My Lai veterans which was the first interview coverage. I did a film about Sister Coretta because I was interested in the Ecumenical Catholic movement. I did these films more or less to fertilise my own mind, to experience, to learn, to find out what was happening out there.

'When I say that I make documentaries for my own experience, I would be dishonest if I did not also say that, of course, I am interested in an audience. The documentary is a recording of modern history. History is, after all, a re-creation of the past by those who have the recording tools. The

Church had its scribes, as does the State. In the Soviet Union, when personalities fall into political disfavour, the encyclopaedias are rewritten. In the United States, school textbooks are now slowly being rewritten in order to deal more honestly with the role the Blacks have had in the shaping of our country. I don't think that we can rely on governments, no matter how benevolent, to be the sole chroniclers of history. There must exist the statements of other witnesses.'

What served as a catalyst for my interview with Haskell Wexler was a televised press conference held to discuss the difficulties he was having in the completion of his documentary on the Weather underground. I met him early one Saturday morning at his home in the Hollywood Hills. He is a tall, slender man, energetic and articulate, with the rare attribute of knowing how to listen. However, he was very firm about remaining silent on the topic of the radical organisations.

'I welcomed the opportunity to do this project because it gave me an exposure to a political organisation about which I knew very little. Apparently, the people involved thought me trustworthy and I do not intend to violate their trust. The completion of the film is dependent upon our ability to gain access to it without surveillance and without another subpoena. Our contacts with the underground have ceased and the project is in abeyance. It is interesting because, even if the film is never completed, the experience has been informing. We have already learned how far the government will go in pre-censoring the work of a documentary film-maker. They have demanded the incomplete film, which is tantamount to confiscating a reporter's notes. We also noted that the Hollywood community, which does not have a reputation for political courage, spoke out in our defence, even though most of them are unsympathetic to the politics of the Weather people. They were defending a very basic freedom.

'The point I would like to make is that people are unaware of how sensitive the power structure is to the potential force of film. There is a novel by E. L. Doctorow called *The Book of Daniel* which is based on the Rosenberg case. A script was written from the book and it dealt not only with the Rosenbergs but also with the 1950s. Because the script alludes to the FBI frame-up in the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the film was never made, and may never be made. The industry is very sensitive to the subject-matter of films. Producers are primarily governed by commercial self-interest. So there exists a political system of censorship and an internal system of artistic repression.

'In the making of *Medium Cool*, the FBI came to me and to Gulf and Western Corporation with the accusation that I had intentionally caused riots in the streets of Chicago for the purposes of my film. It was necessary for me to sign affidavits saying that nothing that I photographed in Chicago, in relation to the riots, was staged by me. Of course, the government does not have to support its accusations. All the government has to say is "We are in receipt of information that Haskell Wexler, in the streets of

Chicago, was inciting riots for his own selfish purposes." What actually delayed the release of the film in 1969 was the fear of the attorneys for Gulf and Western Corporation that, after seeing the film, people would go out into the streets and perpetrate illegal acts. And if that did happen, the officials of the Corporation could then be subject to court action.

'It is naive to think that film-makers cannot create powerful reality images. I feel confident enough to defy anyone, after they have seen *Medium Cool*, to discriminate between an actual happening and a rehearsed scene. What is ironic is that *Medium Cool* was written before the riots took place in Chicago. Its registry date can be checked at the Writers' Guild. In this case, historical event was preceded by a feature film which forecast that event.

'I find people's reactions to "real" death and "movie" death fascinating. For example, in Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend*, perhaps twenty people are dramatically killed. But there is one scene in which the throat of a pig is cut. I have seen the film several times, and each time that scene appears, the audience gasps. They know that they are seeing an animal die. They know that, unlike the actors, when the director says "Cut", the pig will not get up and walk away.'

I vividly recall watching the news coverage of the riots in Detroit, in Newark and in Harlem during the summer of 1967. The spectacle on the television screen was both terrifying and fascinating. The cameramen and the reporters were highly visible in the streets of these embattled cities. Unlike filmed 'stories' of social unrest, these scripts had not been completed. The only certainty the viewer had was that, at regular intervals, the 'news special' would be interrupted by an 'important message from the sponsor'. I, myself, had conflicting feelings about the images that were being projected across the television screen. I was aware of the illusory spatial distance between myself and the panicked men and women and children running through the streets. I gauged the dimensions of the screen and was reassured that it would contain the violence. And yet I wanted that television tube to explode, and the splintered glass to fall amongst the rubble of broken shop windows. The news coverage ended along with the frenzied hopes of people in the streets of Detroit, of Newark and of Harlem.

In Antonioni's *The Passenger*, there is an execution scene. Only those familiar with cinematic technique discern the textual differences between the newsreel footage of the execution of the African rebel and the film story. Wexler also incorporated documentary footage within his feature film. A question that disturbs me is whether an audience has the critical ability to discriminate between fact and fiction. Perhaps the information that is conveyed to us through the news media and our responses to the format which contains that information engage us in the same manner as a film feature or a television series. After all, are we not 'entertained', perversely perhaps, by a dramatic news story, a photograph, an on-the-spot TV news event? What has allowed us, up to now, to differentiate between reality and fiction has been the

context in which the images appear and our own desire to make the distinction.

'What we are talking about is theatre,' Wexler comments. 'Theatre doesn't only happen on a stage or on celluloid, it happens out in the streets. And all kinds of people are now aware of what will play and what won't play. Politicians, for example, have their scenario writers and their make-up men. If they are clever, they understand the importance of timing. This awareness of the utilitarian value of theatre is not necessarily a bad thing. However, the public must become more conscious of it. They must be able to recognise it. We are a consumer society that traffics in images.

'Images that are charged with emotion and sensationalism can be politically very powerful: a photograph of a Vietnamese child burned by napalm or of a picket line in South Boston. People are moved by their emotions and not by a list of facts or a sum of figures, even if those figures are totals of the number of civilian deaths in Vietnam. When people say, "I have decided after careful thought to do the following . . .", what they are really saying is, "I will act on the basis of what I know and what I feel." Film operates on people in the same way.

'Film, because it is a reflection of society, its values and its attitudes, has always had an impact upon the audience. An honest film functions as a catalyst. But for the reaction to be effective, there have to be workable forms within the social structure. Often, there is a time-lag or a problem of geographical distance. And the institutions resist critical pressure. So we put our concern, our energy into a grab-bag and we wait until conditions change. But we usually wait too long and then we forget.'

In August 1963, Wexler filmed *The Bus*, a behavioural study of freedom marchers travelling by bus from San Francisco to Washington D.C. I saw the film for the first time twelve years later. It has become a historical document. The racial riots of the late 1960s have cat-called the innocent rhetoric of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King's 'dream' was murdered by an assassin's bullet. Changing attitudes within the black community today have resulted in white liberals licking their wounds by the roadside—alone.

What is interesting is the dynamic interplay between viewer and image. This is the inevitable consequence of the passage of time. It is said that 'images speak'. The face of an elderly black man photographed by Wexler in 1963 has been appropriated by the popular imagination, now twelve years older. The man's words, which were then a living text, appear now on a written page, vulnerable to fictionalisation: 'In 1919, after WWI ended, I came to Washington D.C. and worked as a packer. I wasn't there very long because, that same day, there was a race riot. I left immediately. I didn't know where I was going. With just the clothes on my back, I jumped a freight train that was going west. . . I decided to go on this march because my conscience said that I had not done enough to promote better race relations. This time I won't be afraid. There are 100,000 people marching with me.'

Wexler's camera offers this man's face to be read by us. We imagine a history of pain,



On the road. Above: 'Bound for Glory'; below: 'Introduction to the Enemy' (title in Britain: 'Vietnam Journey')



humiliation and hunger. We see strength, dignity and courage. This particular man's face becomes a symbol of the Black Man. His words tell us stories of man's injustice toward man. The 'folk-tale' arouses strong feelings in us. His pain is our luxury.

'The people on the bus were at first suspicious of us. I had not been politically active for a number of years, and they were also aware of the manipulative power of the filming. I respected that. But they responded to the way we listened to them: we really tried to find out what had brought them together, who they were. By the end of the trip, we had become good friends. When the film was completed, we arranged a screening for them and they seemed to like our work very much.

'I worked with a guy named Conrad Benson. He edited the film. If it weren't for him, the film would never have been completed. I had become too involved with the people and I felt my obligation so

strongly that I lost all editorial judgment. Conrad, for example, by juxtaposing conversations that had perhaps occurred days apart, was able to make a meaningful synthetic statement. It was not literally accurate, but because his perceptions were sensitive, it became honest.

'I don't believe there is a given "reality". All that we have are people's perceptions of what is. When you proceed to make a documentary, you should be as aware as possible of the historical baggage that you, as an individual, carry. I could also use the phrase, an awareness of your personal psychology. The more aware you are of what you bring to a subject, the more chance exists that what you take from that subject has universal validity. I purposely avoided the word "truth".

It was the truth that took Wexler to Santiago, Chile in 1971 where he filmed *Brazil: A Report on Torture*. A group of Brazilian

political prisoners had been released by the government and flown to Chile. Wexler's film was used as evidence in the United Nations investigation on torture.

'I realised that this was an opportunity to present documented evidence that brutal torture was perpetrated on people who opposed the Brazilian regime. When a woman is seen standing in front of the camera and recounts what has happened to her, to her husband, to her children, then besides the facts, there will also be the emotional impact of her statements. And this might influence the Congress' vote on military aid to Brazil.

'A Swiss ambassador was kidnapped in Brazil. In exchange for him, the Brazilian government released seventy political prisoners who had been selected by the underground. These people chose to flee to Allende's Chile. I was in Chile at the time to film an interview with Salvador Allende. Sol Landau and I decided to meet these people who were compounded in Santiago. Allende would not cooperate with us in establishing contact because he was wary of unsettling Chile's relations with Brazil. We had some difficulty with the Brazilians as well. They were in terrible physical and psychological condition. But after a number of meetings, they consented to the interviews.

'We were interviewing true revolutionaries. We were recording the words of people who died for those words and for their guerrilla acts: "The only democratic thing in Brazil is torture because it is applied to everybody." . . . "They made crocodiles walk over our bodies." . . . "There were two torturers, we recognised them, again and again, who carried their instruments in briefcases. Before each torture session, they would put a cloth on a table and display the equipment. It resembled an exhibition or a party. There was a doctor present, not for humanitarian reasons, but to prevent them from going too far." . . . "I withstood torture out of hatred. Hatred prevented me from betraying my compañeros. Our ideological convictions reinforced us . . ."

'Most of those people have since been killed. I had a Chilean assistant cameraman who was captured by the Junta after Allende was murdered. He has been tortured. I have tried to get word of him through the Red Cross and through senators, but I have heard nothing. I wanted to stage a re-enactment of the *pau de arara* torture, which is the suspension of the victim's body. In this position, other tortures are then committed. The Brazilians refused to "play" the part of the victim. So I asked my assistant. When you see the film, you will see him playing a victim. Here lies the terrible irony. He has been brutally tortured by the Junta.

'I chose to do the re-enactments for propagandist reasons. I wanted their words to be as graphic as possible. I wanted people to see the *pau de arara*, which means the "perch of a bird".

The victim became the torturer in Wexler's dramatic re-enactment. The 'victim' becomes a victim as a consequence of his involvement with the film-making. Pain, psychological and physical, is contained within the nouns and the verb tenses. For Wexler, words were not strong

enough. The people's faces were not expressive enough. He needed artifice to come closer to reality.

'That evaluation is correct,' he says. 'I mean that a re-enactment taking on elements more real than the actual statements is an accurate description. I did not feel uncomfortable with my decision. I wanted to present to the world information in the most dramatic way possible, given the film resources at my disposal at the time. I feel guilty about only one thing—I did not like having the Brazilians demonstrating the torture techniques. They were visibly upset by the experience. Some of them concealed their feelings by laughing, and saying, "Imagine me, a torturer!"'

Social psychologists have a term—behavioural engineering—which refers to the manipulation of behaviour in environments where the authority figure supports a defined role playing. Recently, researchers have become increasingly interested in exploring the exchangeability of roles. Their cues have come from history. What seems to fascinate them is determining the thresholds of pain. How far can a human being be pushed before he rebels? How much electric shock is required to break down a man or woman's ethical judgment? In what circumstances will a victim become an oppressor?

As I watched Wexler's film, these questions were dramatically raised. The men and women who stared through the camera into my eyes forced me to consider other questions as well. Would I have been able to endure the torture to which these people had been subjected? Would I have exchanged my humanity for my life? Was I a potential torturer? The context in which I posed these questions—the unthreatening comfort of the screening room—did not mock them. Rather, it revealed how well our society has managed to contain the dynamics of violence and heroism. They are terms which have been de-realised. 'Responsible' men and women do not include them within the lexicon of their daily lives. We do not recognise their markings in the ordinary gestures of our experiences. But we see them played out in newsprint and on the screen. How inconceivable it is that a forty-year-old woman, a mother of children, Sarah Jane Moore, could, for political reasons, attempt to assassinate President Ford. The only explanation, intimated by officials, is that she is psychologically unstable. Perhaps she is. However, what the popular imagination in this country finds difficult to entertain is that an individual or groups of individuals can either perpetrate violent acts or be the victims of violent acts because of their political beliefs.

Wexler's simulation of the *pau de arara* was gratuitous. The words and the faces of the Brazilian revolutionaries were powerful. Their experiences need not have been reduced to play-acting in order to be affecting.

In 1974, a social psychologist, Stanley Milgram, published a highly controversial book called *Obedience to Authority*. His research concerned the above questions. He wanted to see how much electric voltage one individual would administer to another. It was a simulated experiment. He enlisted volunteers. In a laboratory, a professional

played the part of the 'victim'; the volunteer played the part of the 'oppressor'. Milgram was present as the authority figure.

'I know Milgram's work,' Wexler says. 'I've been in correspondence with him. By placing the "oppressor" in a particular environment, he detached him from the consequences of his actions. I think that Milgram's work has to do with the killers of the modern world. It explains how a military bomber who flew at 75,000 feet above a Vietnamese village could drop tons of napalm. The bomber never saw human beings. He had a complex technical job which involved radar and computers and release factors, and not value judgment.'

During April 1974, Jane Fonda, Tom Hayden and Haskell Wexler received permission from the North Vietnamese government to visit Hanoi. Under the auspices of the 'Indo-Chinese Peace Campaign', *Introduction to the Enemy* was completed in September of the same year. Although he was assisted by a North Vietnamese director, the crew consisted of one man—Haskell Wexler. I viewed the film in October 1975. It was screened for me by the two editors, Christine Burrill and Bill Yahraus.

The film is essentially a travelogue of Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden's visit. Wexler's hand-held camera travels the road from Hanoi to Quang Tri province capturing the beauty of the countryside which defies its own devastation. We are told by a peasant that they have begun planting in the bomb craters. The camera unexpectedly

Ideology and image. 'Introduction to the Enemy'; refugee at Camp Pendleton

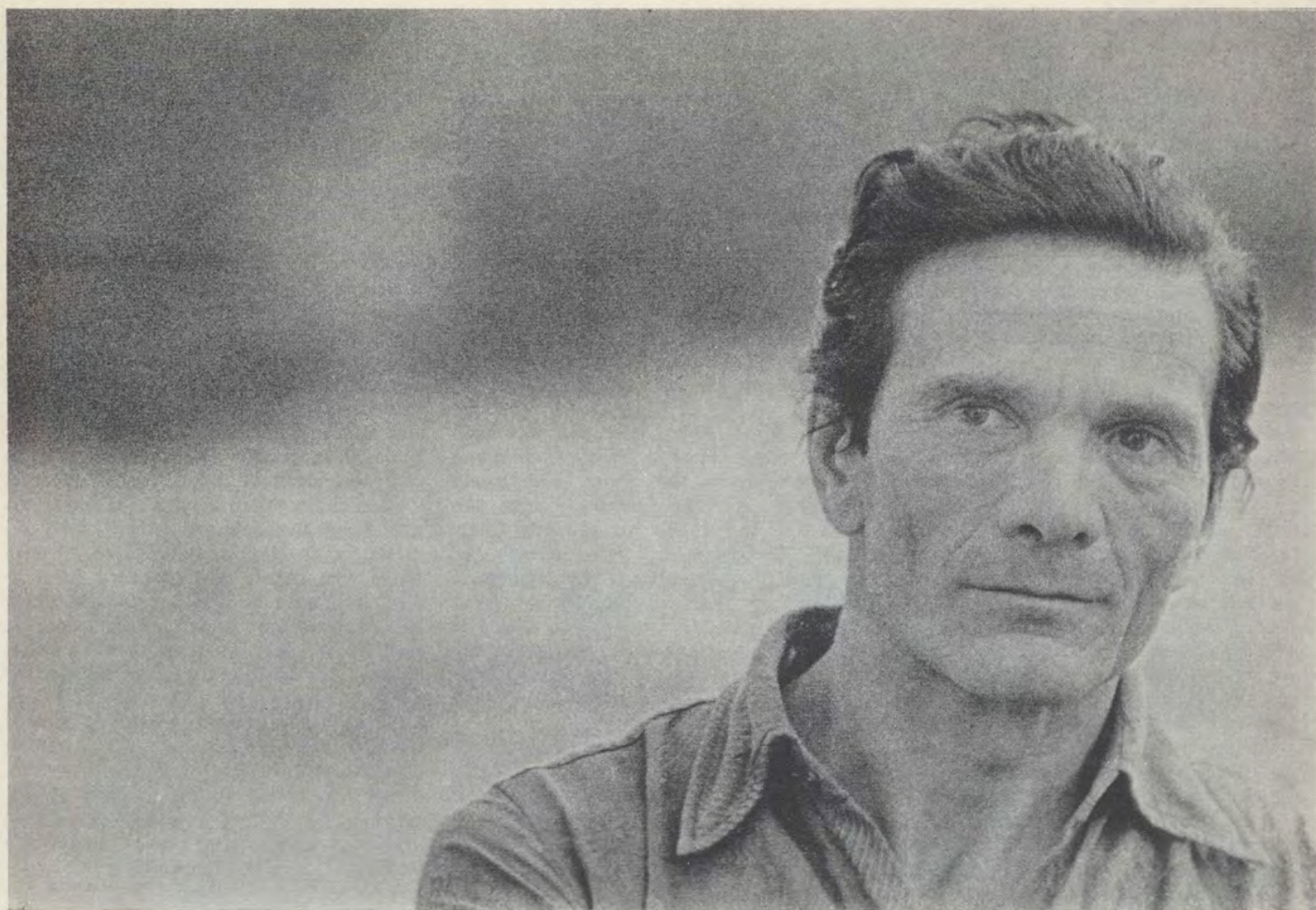


watches a young farmer being brought into the surgery of a provincial hospital. A land mine had exploded in his field. Moments later, his body is brought out, covered by a sheet. In a close-up shot, a very old man is asked if he can remember a time when there was no war. He looks into the camera, smiles and says, 'What did you say? Peace? No, I really can't remember.'

The war has ended and *Introduction to the Enemy* has become a historical document. There are questions about the North Vietnamese people whose answers might be found in this film. The images are there for interpretation, but the probing never goes beyond the surface. The information is prescribed by the interviewers, Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden. The victory of the North Vietnamese people only makes us more eager to understand them. How do men and women endure the conditions of prolonged warfare against their own people? Why did these people choose to fight for a social vision that they might not have lived to see? What were the personal histories which led them to become revolutionaries? The answers to these questions were political assumptions which the interviewers took for granted. We see in the thin bodies and worn faces an overwhelming expression of conviction. They embody a human translation of political ideology which is incomprehensible to many people. Wexler photographed them with great sensitivity, but as individuals they remain remote figures in a landscape, merely propagandist pawns.

In June 1975 I visited Camp Pendleton (California), where I interviewed refugees from South Vietnam. Most of them had fled their country out of fear. A small number were opportunists who took advantage of the confusion. Each of them responded initially to my questions by saying, 'I am not political.' Those who were not military officers were generally victims of superstition and rumour. Young girls who had worked for American agencies in Saigon heard stories of forced marriages with wounded and incapacitated Viet Cong. 'The North Vietnamese are the enemy. They are communists. They are not Vietnamese.' A young man described the rape and murder of his wife and child. A Colonel quite openly assessed the desertion of his soldiers to the highest bidder. And repeatedly I heard the astonishing statement, 'I will return to my country with the American soldiers. In the meantime, I will work very hard and build a life for my children.' What was commonly understood about the communist way of life was that they would be denied freedom. Their buying power would be controlled. They would all have to dress alike. 'I know nothing about the political ideology of the North.'

This was the prologue to my *Introduction to the Enemy*. Objectivity strained between image and ideology. What would a South Vietnamese sitting with me in the screening room have thought of the film? Would the abstract enemy become recognisable to him? 'Every Vietnamese knows that this is one country. The partition is artificial, imposed by foreigners.' (North Vietnamese author interviewed by Jane Fonda.) Every statement, in itself, constitutes a fact. And truth is perceived from a selective point of view.



Pier Paolo Pasolini

Gideon Bachmann

Photographs: Deborah Beer

PASOLINI

AND THE MARQUIS DE SADE

Gideon Bachmann visited Pasolini on several occasions during the shooting of his film *Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom*, based on the book by the Marquis de Sade but placed in the 1943 fascist republic in Northern Italy which Mussolini set up after the fall of Rome and before his final defeat. Shooting took place in the spring of 1975, and editing on the film was completed during the autumn. News of Pasolini's murder, on November 1, came when this article was already in proof.

BLANGIS: 'On the day of judgment, God will surely scold us in these terms: "Since you saw that on earth all is vicious and criminal, why did you lose yourselves on the road of virtue? The perpetual disasters which I, God, have imposed upon the universe, how could they fail to convince you that I love only disorder? Every day I supplied you with examples of destruction, so why did you not destroy? Imbeciles! Why did you not imitate me?"'

CURVAL: 'Thus even in our monstrosities we will never be free of the model of God! As each one of us inflicts upon the bodies of his victims his own anarchic will, all we become is God on earth!'

—from the script

Day One

Pasolini has been shooting here in Mantua for nearly a month. Originally he had planned to shoot the film in 37 working days, but now the schedule has been

extended. When I mention to him that the Marquis de Sade is reputed to have written the book on which this film is based in 37 evenings in the Bastille, he is surprised; and a bit sorry that he won't be able to duplicate this feat after all.

I am reminded of something that struck me when I went to Iran to see him work on *Arabian Nights*. I had been reading the script. I remember saying that some viewers might not know what the Tulu characters were, which Shehrezade had talked of and which were now part of a character's lines. And Pasolini had said, 'Why, what are they?', making me realise that his sources were researched only superficially, and that, to him, everything contributed by virtue of its physiognomy, its external aspect, as it were, and not necessarily through its intrinsic meaning. He had confirmed this later when discussing his choice of non-professional actors, stating that his films were 'realistic' inasmuch as they utilised 'real' faces. The magnificent Abbasid mosques, the Persian faces, and the literary masterpiece he was mining were all on the same level as the book he was now using, written by a tormented soul in an 18th-century prison: points of departure, textures of environment. What interested him was the relevance to himself, to the experience of making *his* film, *his* statement.

It is a behaviourist view: Pasolini doesn't interfere, doesn't impose sentiment, doesn't believe in the human being as an originating agent. Language becomes part of the whole,

part of the fateful altogether. It is, in Skinner's term, 'verbal behaviour'. The difference between various Arabic written characters and the cultural implications of this difference does not interest him; and the hows and wherefores of the Marquis de Sade's circumstances in writing his confused, megalomaniac *psychopathia sexualis* will not interfere with Pasolini's stylised, abstracted exhumation. I begin to see the connections, and the reasons for so much of the criticism levelled at him. And I have an immediate approach to what is in the process of happening around me.

On the surface, it seems that he has changed his style. There seems to be none of the sense of immediacy to which I had become accustomed by seeing his documentary-size crews at work in England, Iran and contemporary Italian landscapes. There are, this time, some real actors involved, and I see at once that he is making them repeat lines and actions in front of the turning cameras until he gets what he wants. Which implies that he wants a very specific thing. His erstwhile 'magmatic' method, the letting-things-happen in front of the camera by setting up only the atmosphere and the dramatic condition and giving the non-professionals the leeway of being themselves, has given way to greater rigidity.

I have always felt that Pasolini was tremendously hurried when shooting and that he seemed impatient with the machinery required to turn his ideas into images. De Sade, who didn't have much time either, or didn't think he did, might have inspired a work in the same style: hurried, prolific, irresistible. But this time Pasolini's haste,

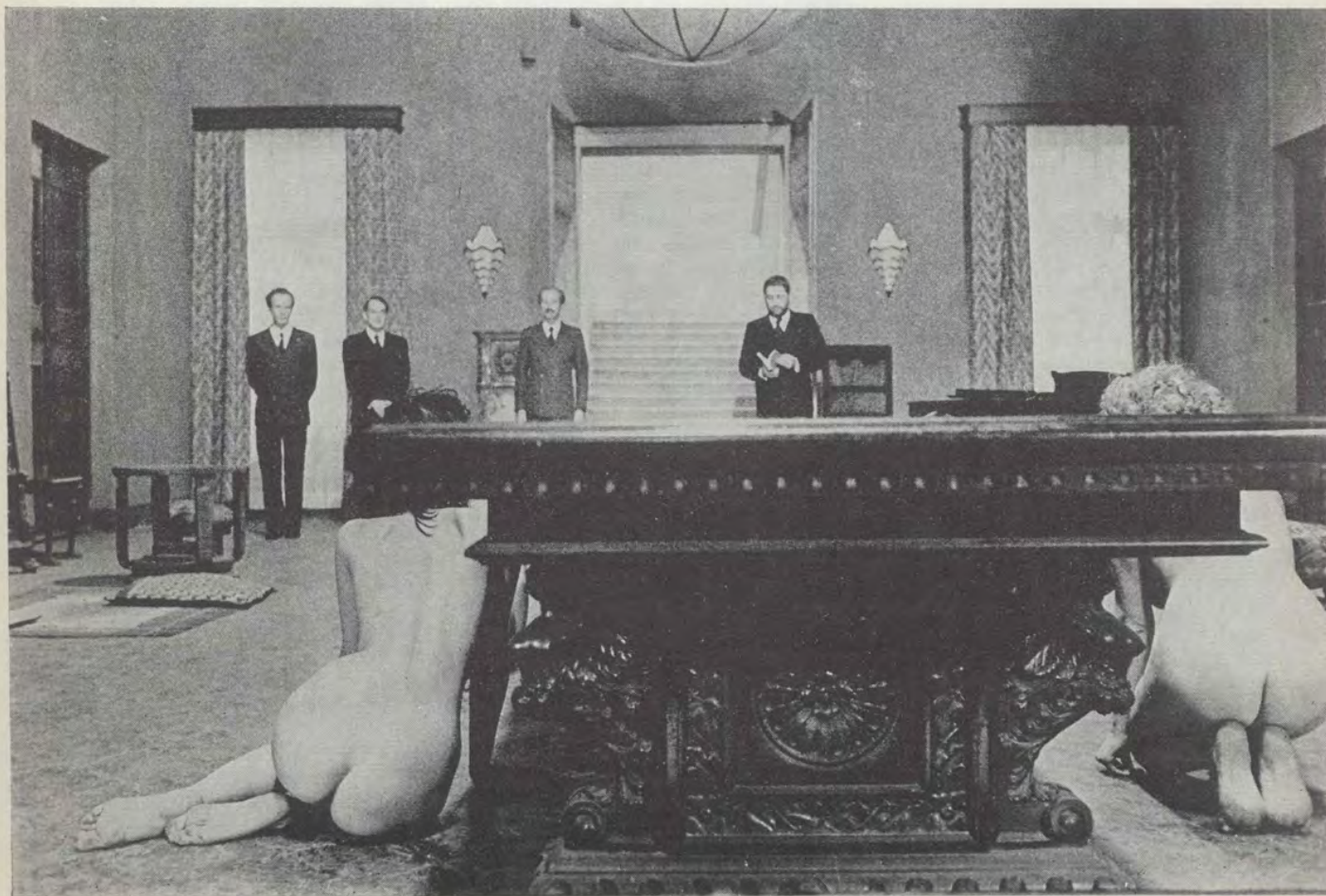
he says, is more calculated. 'Previously I experienced reality by taking from it, as much and as intensely as I could. But this time I want a formally perfect film. In de Sade there is the same apparent conflict between style and structure, but he didn't have the cohesion in him, after all, to care for the finesse of the page. He was a writer of structures, sometimes elegant, sometimes open and flexible, but his flexibility is like that of an accordion: the basic ideas remain in order as if lined up on a spit. In juxtaposition to him, I was educated in a literary climate where form counts. For him the ideas were the important thing, and some of his pages are pretty bad, though there are always phrases that stand out in extraordinary beauty. I think that if he had cared for the page as such, I could have felt more of a sense of identification. His would have been the same kind of elegance I am striving for.'

I have come on a pleasant day, when the sun had early swept away the Po valley fogs. The shooting is at Cavriana, some miles from Mantua, in the Villa Mirra. It is one of those Napoleon-slept-here places from the immediate pre-Umbertine days, later used as headquarters, after World War I, for a variety of well-meaning international causes. Pasolini has chosen it for its resplendent decay, its overgrown gazebos and its rose-bushes choked by wisteria, and perhaps the cemetery smell of its hedges. In a keeper's cottage on the edge of the grounds he is shooting scenes in dormitories where the victims of orgies pass their tormented nights, to be awakened in the cruel morning by the renewal of the daily, sadistic regimentation.

He has divided the film in a 'Dantesque' manner into cycles—blood, manias, excrement—to give it, he says, 'a certain theological verticalism.' I happen to have arrived on a shooting day in the excrement cycle, and the first scene I watch is the rude awakening of a group of nude girls as they are having their chamber pots controlled. Since the fruits of their digestion are strictly reserved for the delectation of their tormentors, the girls who in the night had had recourse to the pots are to be punished. Aldo Valletti, one of the four torturers, and Caterina Buratto, the procurer-mistress of the dorm (who as Rena Buratto was one of the stars of the White Telephone era, and came to later fame as the mystery woman in *8½* and Giulietta's mother in *Juliet of the Spirits*) officiate. Sandro Barelli had spent hours giving that prison wall aspect to the walls, ruining with graffiti and urine stain the specially printed Liberty wallpaper. Again and again cross-eyed Valletti, who in twenty years of playing extras had never spoken a line on screen, marches into the room sniffing questioningly, attempting a forbidding look. But the incongruity of the scene does not translate easily into a recordable image: patiences wilt under the arc lights and only Pasolini remains unruffled through the many takes.

Since coprophagy occurs at regular intervals, Sergio Chiusi, Special Effects department head, has had to produce a comestible product. Swiss chocolate, broken biscuits, condensed milk and marmalade, which is then squeezed through plastic tubing to dress it in its habitual form. Since it is lunchtime, I try a piece on my sandwich. As usual, it's the idea of it that

Up at the villa: the exploiters and the exploited



disgusts; a perfect illustration of Kierkegaard: the event assumes its contents after the fact. History, seen backwards, creates its own significance. It is precisely what Pasolini is doing to de Sade by resettling him in fascism. I am subject to the same suggestiveness: I spit out the chocolate mess. Laughter roars up around me—half the crew has gone through the same experiment with the same result.

It is hard, of course, to take all this seriously when these scenes are one's first glimpse of a film which has considerable ideological pretension. But the professionalism of crew and actors is complete. Pasolini never divulges the meaning of individual scenes to anyone involved with the production (least of all to actors and technicians), yet all are convinced of being involved in an enterprise of total respectability. At the same time there is a feeling of complicity in the air; all seem aware that while the aim is high the form will lend itself to misinterpretation. The variety of sexual clarities displayed arouse a sly smile in many a corner, but there is this absolute trust in the man who has chosen this subject matter in order to express things that go beyond it. Obviously this is the only way a subject like this can be turned into film. I cannot discern any difference in the treatment, on the set, between the purely sexual and the rest of the logistics. The pathological is treated straightforwardly, until the differences between it and the 'normal' become our own invention. I stand there, wondering if a less earth-bound culture, a less immediate functionalism in daily life than that of the Italian, could have formed a race which so simply accepts aberrations as part of social intercourse.

Day Two

The film has moved to another villa, now a farm, decrepit and only partially inhabited. Three rooms have been completely refurbished: Léger-type murals cover the walls of one room from floor to ceiling, art nouveau and Bauhaus paintings have been hung on those of the 'viewing room', and curtains woven at a cost of 6 million lire, according to period designs, in golden-beige *uni* colours, hang heavily alongside the high windows. Pasolini, as usual, mans his own camera, while Tonino delle Colli, the lighting director, sets up the intricate early morning sun that the brutes outside the windows are to simulate. The whole place reverberates from the vibrations of the generator down in the hall. It doesn't matter, of course. As with all Italian films, no direct sound is being recorded.

Tonino shot *La Ricotta*, which I have always considered Pasolini's best film, and they have worked together many times. He tells me that Pasolini wants this film to be 'crystalline', almost dry in formal construction, and that he would have preferred to shoot it in black and white. Apparently he agreed to Grimaldi's demand for colour with the reservation that he might be allowed to print it in a special process to create an almost black and white effect on colour stock, to increase the feeling of starkness and abstraction. Tonino gives me the simplest explanation for Pasolini's need to man the camera himself: he hates to see rushes, apparently, and looking through the



The refurbished villa setting: '... rigidity and a sense of order'

camera during the actual shooting is the only way he can see what he's getting on to the film.

Personally, I think it goes deeper than that. For a man who writes—poetry, essays, articles, novels, political analyses, scripts and translations—and makes films, directs theatrical groups, teaches, produces, travels, collects, and lives so intensely, it must be hard to allow for the necessary group effort that the cinema entails. For a man who essentially *writes* his films, the need to hold the instrument, his *caméra-stylo*, in his own hands, is not only understandable, it is obvious.

Tonino tells me that Pasolini never uses a normal focal, it's either wide-angle or a long lens, and that he uses the zoom strictly as a quick method to change lenses, not for editorialising by claiming to be moving in or away. Often, he says, Pasolini keeps the camera running while asking an actor to repeat a scene. He is almost always at shoulder level, likes back-lighting, hand-holds without worrying over unsteadiness, and likes to get shots over with as fast as possible. Sometimes he deliberately avoids camera proximity and the drama that this evokes, fearing that he might be forced into a reverse angle, an unnecessary burden. In the end he explains to me the business of shooting from shoulder height: since both he and Pasolini are not very tall, what I had thought was the level of their shoulder was actually the level of their eyes.

I grab a moment between takes to ask Pasolini about his use of music. 'There will be no accompaniment, no unmotivated music in the film. If I use any at all, it will be dramatically significant. I may use *Carmina Burana*, the Orff adaptation. Typical fascist music.' I am somewhat stunned; a medieval oratorio dedicated to corporeal pleasures seems a far cry from what pleasure has been reduced to here. But Orff fits in with the Kokoschkas and the Feiningers.

Pasolini tries to help me out. 'You see,' he says, 'these four torturers are not proletarians. They are, as they were in de Sade, intellectuals, and in my story they do in fact quote from contemporary French

philosophers. They are in a villa which they have perhaps confiscated from some rich deported Jew who owned these paintings, and they are cultured in the same pseudo-cultured way as the German and Italian party hierarchy were, with pseudo-scientific ideas and pseudo-racist rationalisations. It was what Hitler and Mussolini called a "decadent" world, it was to be destroyed but exerted its fascination upon these louts. It so well expresses this era of fascism, when all real values had disappeared under a heavy coating of power-seeking and exploitation. It was the last time that the human power drive expressed itself in such direct, linear, almost symbolic terms. Today all has become covered with sophistication: education, and the failures of the systems that we have invented, have blinded us to the basic, underlying causes for these failures. We tend to lose track of the problems in our need for rapid solutions and the illusions we thus have to believe. It is just one of the ways in which the story maintains its contemporary meaning. Orff, Severini, Duchamps are part of it, as the fascists are part of it. I have also brought the killing up to date. In the executions I have used the four modes of killing still practised by our legal institutions: hanging, shooting, the garotte and the electric chair, methods de Sade could invent only partially.'

The scene being shot seems to me almost too symbolic. Again and again Paolo Bonacelli, one of the four main characters, marches to the end of the corridor between the rooms, mounts a pedestal upon which a beautiful, carved wooden chair with a high back has been placed, is handed binoculars, and peers out beyond the set, through a simulated window: one of those anticlimaxes frequent in watching the shooting of films. What he is looking at will be filmed later, in Rome. All is done without emotion, without facial movement. Since I know he is supposed to watch the climax of the film, the final executions, this apparent lack of emotion stirs my curiosity. Pasolini explains that the film is conceived as a rite, a ritual. He quotes a line from the script to show the rigidity and sense of order that



Girl victims; boys in fascist uniforms

he has imposed. The four killers have established a rule that during the final executions each of them in turn will be the killer, two will be his accomplices, and one will watch from this window. 'Thus,' the line goes, 'each one of us will in turn have the philosophical pleasure of contemplation, the particularly abject pleasure of complicity, and the supreme pleasure of action.' He goes on to say that he must constantly remind the actors of the ritual aspect of the proceedings. 'This time I want even the non-professionals to act like professionals. I now refuse to use cut-aways in order to "fix" a badly delivered line. I insist on exact delivery.'

But I see that he practically avoids rehearsing. He instructs the actors briefly, then starts shooting at once. It seems wasteful to me, all these retakes as the actors repeat. He may be trying to be different, but it must be hard for him, after years of applying a freer method. He admits this, stating that he is hoping to find a middle road. He doesn't want to miss something that might come out of an actor before his intuition has been smothered by exactness. 'I try not to make them feel too responsible for their failures, and shooting at once helps the feeling of our doing the work together. I am seeking perfection, since the modernistic disregard for form seems to me to be an element of alienation for the viewer used to a certain cinematographic language. The whole structure serves as a sort of fancy wrapping for the horrible content that is de Sade's contribution, and that of the fascists. I want to convey a sense of elegance and precision, of irreality. This film is less real because it is more perfect.'

Day Three

Another Emilian villa. This one is not far from Bologna and is now a public park. It's a foggy morning, and children have come in busloads from nearby towns at Pasolini's invitation, to look wonderingly at the boys in Nazi uniforms so familiar to them from their comic books. We are in 1943, and the Germans, then supreme in the Friuli area, have rounded up, at the behest

of the four sadists, groups of youngsters from the surrounding towns, who are now to parade, nude, for the choosing of the forty or so victims of the forthcoming debaucheries.

It is the classic scene of every pornographic novel, with or without literary pretensions, the first moment of the manifestation of supremacy of one being over another. Since the film is to be made without emotion, I find it hard to understand the willingness, even complicity, with which these boys, even as film actors, expose themselves for the camera's anatomical panning and tilting. There is joggling for position, pride of the chosen, sly jockeying and competition. For a moment, the film scene and the reality of its filming seem one. These boys are proud of their bodies in front of Pasolini as they might have been, in their innocence, in de Sade's castle in Switzerland two hundred years ago. When they were picked for the film, they were not told about the script. There might be some nudity, they knew, seeing that it was a Pasolini film. But none were aware of the portent of what they are involved with. And yet, so strong is the career strife, so important the parts in a Pasolini film for their financial future, that none rebels.

Since this 'picking' scene is straight out of de Sade, I get a chance to discuss the story of the film itself with Pasolini. He has transposed the work, but has maintained its action, the organisation of orgies and their realisation, and in the end the death of everybody. He keeps repeating that he simply wants to replace the word 'God' as de Sade used it, with the word 'power', since the sadists are always the powerful ones. The four protagonists are a banker, a duke, a bishop and a judge, the representatives of constituted might. In a visionary way, through the sexual metaphor, he wants to illustrate the relationship between exploiter and exploited, to show that in both sadism and power politics human beings become objects, bodies become wares, and that our economic organisation, throughout history, has tended to be basically sadistic.

Marx, he says, didn't invent this know-

ledge, nor are his followers eliminating it. The idea of productivity entails possessiveness, and this in turn creates hierarchies of exploitation. But he doesn't consider this unnatural: in nature the submissive instinct is as strong as the domineering one. All the systems of thought which create value judgments, stating that one is better or worse than the other, were systems imposed from above, Christianity and Marxism not being exceptions, and thus no system can justly claim to be 'popular'. The 'ruling class' is simply that group whose ideas permeate a particular moment in cultural time. The instincts, valueless in themselves, remain. Only one economic system has touched the basic chords of our being, 'consumerism'. We no longer accept our fate stoically, like old peasants. In our fight to raise our social standards we become little dictators, little power seekers. That is why fascism has a universal appeal. The real, individual values, acquired throughout history, are lost in the new permissiveness. Non-emotional sex, industrialised exploitation, and the final disintegration of the family and the tribe that he calls the 'terrible double bottom of our new liberties.' What we are doing by trying to destroy our traditions is a descent to the greatest conformism in history.

It turns out that he is not concerned with being understood, however. What he hopes to create is a mystery, in the medieval sense. 'A holy presentation, and thus profoundly enigmatic. If it were easily understood, it would be simplistic. Not to be understood or even to be *misunderstood* is an intrinsic dimension of this work. For example, in the script I use quotations from Blanchot, Lautréamont, Klossowski, even Nietzsche. But only as part of the story, depicting the consciousness of the characters in what they are doing. They interpret de Sade for me. I don't use psychoanalysis in the film as a tool of direction, just as I am not using our modern way of understanding things emotionally. I am in no way trying to arouse sympathy, the film would lose its sting if I did. In this I am also true to de Sade: I have not shown victims whose side the viewer could be on. Pity would have been horrible as an element in this film, nobody would have stood for it. In any case, I don't believe in pity.'

Since he is beginning to touch on specifics, after these excursions, I try to nail him down. Is there a way of getting from the image to these meanings except through the brain? Or, more important, how can he turn his ideas into pictures? How is he going to illustrate Klossowski? Willingly, he goes into details, and hearing him discuss Klossowski's ideas of the eternal repetitiveness of the act of love, I realise the man is talking about himself, about his eternal reaching out, and his eternal disappointment. All this harking back to other authorities, I begin to feel, is a search, a need to find that he is not alone, that at least in disappointment he has peers. Disappointment in man and in God.

'From Klossowski I have picked excerpts at random. The things about the gesticulations of love, of eros, which eternally repeat themselves. The code of repetitiousness, which brings him to the conclusion that sodomitic gestures are the most typical

because they are the most useless. It's the most gratuitous gesture, and thus the most expressive of the infinite repetitiousness of the act of love, and at the same time the most mechanical. It is even worse for the executioner or the torturer, because he can undertake his gesture only once, upon any single victim. Instead of killing one, he must kill thousands, in order to be able to repeat his gesture. Another adaptation I have borrowed from both Klossowski and Blanchot is the model of God they propose. All these Nietzschean supermen are just another form of Gods on earth. Their model is always God. In negating him they accept his existence. Especially since they deny him with passion, and not just in a rationalist, libertarian way. By not refusing him coldly they render him real, in the best tradition of our Western anti-clericalism. Somehow, it seems to me that this is the first time I am making a film about the modern world.'

But picking from de Sade, why just from *The 120 Days of Sodom*? Writing only five hours a day, in the dusk hours, in a hurry, the Marquis produced a book that is necessarily sketchy, deteriorating, in the second half, into a numbered listing of tortures. Using the 'Dantesque' manner of cycles, and of these the three of blood, manias and excrement, Pasolini had wanted to represent, initially, three of the 120 days, one day per 'cycle'. This idea fell more or less by the wayside, and no clear distinction has remained separating the days. The lighting, for example, is always even, and adds to the feeling of ritual. Ritual and order are always the means by which authority, power, suppression and fascism manifest themselves. In this morning's scene, the choosing of victims, I see his main perpetrators walking about with notebooks into which they carefully make notations and from which they read laws they have themselves concocted. Votes are collected in a glass urn; the four monsters will pick only those victims they can all agree upon. One after another the boys lower their pants, the camera passes, once up and down, away, the next, once up and down.

Outside, in the formal gardens, peasants have grouped. At first I think they are the real mothers and fathers, happy for their sons' aspiring careers. Then I recognise the black shirts under ragged, double-breasted jackets. They are the actors who play the fascists of their day, for once not the uniformed, symbolic marchers, but the grass-root farmers, the ones who had supported Mussolini in 1922 and had brought him to power, caught now, at the last gasp of the regime, with their stubborn peasant belief that a man who starts out as a socialist must needs remain one. If ever a lesson needs learning, it is the one that seeps out of the sad eyes of these men, who really lived what they are now acting. A lesson which, with today's advances of socialism in Emilia, has a new significance. The lesson of vigilance and creative doubting.

For Pasolini, placing the film in the period of the Salò Republic was simply an expedient, because it is a time and a place he himself experienced when as a student he fled from Bologna into this region and here began writing poetry as a partisan. It is also a period recent enough in history for people

to identify with, so that it will not remain pure allegory. Because, despite everything, he wants his work to have meaning and usefulness for the people he feels so much part of.

'I want us to realise that there are basic human instincts that must be recognised. My insistence in replacing de Sade's 'God' with the power concept is based on the realisation that today one needs to fight the power exercised over man's body as much as in his time one needed to oppose the power exercised over his beliefs. Control over the mind implied control over the body. Today we have come full circle, because what is being exploited is man's mind and his body. In consumer society we are being given a false sense of freedom, because we are suddenly allowed to do things that had been taboo. But as one of the characters in my film says, in a society where nothing is permitted everything can be done, whereas in a society where something, one thing, is permitted, only that thing can be done. When Curval says that we are all God on earth, he is really expressing the false sense of liberation of consumer permissiveness, the idea that we must all fight for "equality" in what we buy, we must all become, as in the business world, more cruel in order to succeed. Isn't that what Hitler wanted? De Sade was a romantic, he thought he was describing something special. Today we know that he wasn't.'

Last Day

Today is the last shooting day. Pasolini has finally come to Cinecittà for the last scene in the film—the death of all the boys and girls who had not previously been tortured to perdition. It is common practice in Italian film-making, when shooting takes place on locations outside Italy or away from Rome, to come back here, to the safety of the illusion factory, for the scenes of sex and violence. On the *Arabian Nights* locations, the same had occurred: scenes were shot without their culminations, which were later done, in concert, at the Labaro studios outside Rome, where for a period of a few weeks nothing but highlights of sexual encounters were shot. The lower parts of male anatomies, close-ups of intercourse, a stabbing or two, all utilising only body fractions, in order to fit, in the cutting, the faces which had been photographed in Eritrea or Yemen.

The courtyard of one of those Emilian villas has been reproduced in the studio by the set designer, Dante Ferretti. It represents the view from that non-existent window in the villa near Mantua, that the four protagonists had seen through their binoculars. The victims were to be violated, tortured and killed, in that order, to underline the idea of the 'mercification' of the body. Pleasure obtained by a single human being from the total subjugation of another, Pasolini says, represents the precise relationship between boss and worker in capitalism. It had been his decision to place de Sade in 1943 which had made the film fall into shape in his mind, because, in the political climate of this short-lived fascist satellite, the total anarchy of power, which de Sade had only been able to imagine, had become manifest. Here the domination by the German-supported Quislings had been

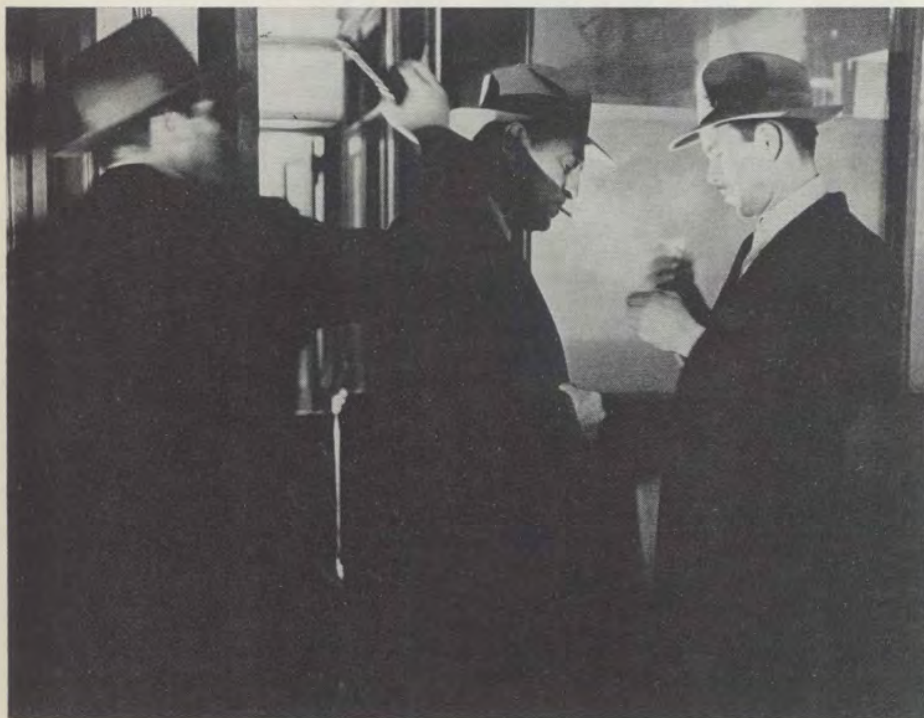
absolute. Men and women had been reduced to objects. He knows: his brother died as a partisan in this area, near his mother's birth town of Casarsa.

The most striking aspect of watching these scenes actually being shot is the lack of emotion with which they are set up, rehearsed and performed. I do not seem to be watching a girl's stomach cut open with broken glass or another girl's scalp lovingly removed in close-up, but the well-oiled activation of an industrial process. Pasolini does not want these scenes, which he says he abhors, to stand out in any way from the rest of the film, but rather to appear as the logical conclusion to a philosophy which is not particular only to the monsters he has chosen to portray. But although I know that it is a plastic skin with a bag of red paint inside which is being cut, and although I have watched the make-up men work for two hours to place a false, removable scalp over a girl's hair, the effect of seeing the scenes actually done is chilling. Pasolini is calm, angry only at the time it takes to set up each trick shot. Once a nipple has been cut, it takes over an hour to replace a new false breast, reconnect the plastic tubing to the 'blood' supply being pumped from a few metres away, re-instruct the torturers to make another, more realistic attempt at portraying an activity of which none could have had previous experience. The crew take it all as rather a joke; the enormous false penises with which Pasolini has had the executors equipped arouse an unending stream of *double-entendre*.

But this is not a funny film. All the people here have worked with Pasolini before and carry great esteem for him, but even these hardy souls shake their heads doubtfully at what they see, prophesying that the film will never pass censorship in Italy. Even Pasolini himself is resigned to this idea; he wants no publicity. 'In Italy they would just store up the information to take us to court. We must build up a reputation for the film abroad before trying to spring it on the Italian authorities.'

This last day is the culmination of a week in the torture courtyard. I have seen sodomisation, rape, hanging, shooting, scalping, a variety of anal activities, executions by garrotting and electric chair, disfigurements of all sorts, beauty defiled in all possible ways, human bodies destroyed. But no sign of pleasure from the torturers, only anger, aggressiveness, disdain. De Sade, rationalising, described subtle joys. Pasolini, socialising, has eliminated these. Even for sadists or masochists, I assume, this will be a sad film, at best an intellectual exercise. I could imagine that for a moviegoing public it will be too cold, too remote for identification, offering no opening for emotional involvement. Towards evening Pasolini is alone, thinking and frowning. He hasn't joked with his crew today, hasn't played soccer for a month, has worked on a closed set for a week. All these are unusual for him, whose joy in life stems mostly from human contacts. I can practically hear his loneliness stealing across the set, his isolation from his easy-going countrymen who take it all as just another Pasolini curiosity. He would like to reach them, but has to claim distance and 'mystery'. The cinema, industrialising his poetry, may yet destroy him. ■

Film REVIEWS



Echoes of the 1940s: Robert Mitchum under attack in 'Farewell, My Lovely'

Innocents with Dirty Hands and Farewell, My Lovely

In positing new directions for the increasingly pressing, nostalgia-induced problem of how to recreate the world of the Forties thriller, both *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* have, curiously enough, left its most distinctive icon severely alone. Art Nouveau artefacts may replace the sense of shabby squalor, and Philip Marlowe may become an oddball layabout, but the female of the species, sexy, slinky and venomous to know—uniquely native to this hermetic world because she is so expendable to everybody including herself—remains as though preserved in amber, a mirage of beauty as illusory as the rain lending a momentary glitter to dark city streets.

It therefore comes as no surprise when the Dick Richards remake of *Farewell, My Lovely* (Fox-Rank), though prematurely ageing Marlowe into a fashionably world-weary loser, sticks to the rules with the deadly Velma by having her make her first entry swaying with feline provocation down a grand staircase in an instantly recognisable pastiche of Lauren Bacall. And scarcely more of a surprise, in one way, when Chabrol's *Innocents with Dirty Hands* (Fox-Rank), coping with one of those murder plots that combine the heartlessness of *Double Indemnity* with the ingenuity of *Les Diaboliques*, has Romy Schneider as the scheming lady first develop a tentative hint of Veronica Lake, and then, as she coolly embarks on the murder of her husband, fix definitively on Lizabeth Scott.

With its spiral of breathlessly absurd reversals whereby the murder victims turn out to be very

much alive, the script of *Innocents with Dirty Hands* is a mechanical contrivance far removed from the series of thrillers Chabrol has made with Stéphane Audran. At times, with not one but two dead men lurching back into the reckoning, hilarity threatens to overtake the proceedings. Chabrol, however, is way ahead. Long before the plot has begun to bunch, he has provided a series of happily larger-than-life characters—the two budding Maigrets, the coyly theatrical lawyer, the misogynistic friend—each of whom appropriates large segments of the action for their private use in spinning their own (invariably inaccurate) deductions and suppositions.

In Chabrol's more characteristic domestic thrillers, where murder is determined less by plot than by character, Stéphane Audran's enigmatic ambivalence tends to lead one into a quagmire of inextricably shaded motives. Here, on the other hand, there is never, and never meant to be, any question but that Romy Schneider/Lizbeth Scott intends to murder her ageing, drink-sodden husband (Rod Steiger), and that she intends to murder him because she is infatuated with the sleek young stranger who turns up on her doorstep. Adding a few familiar variations of his own (notably the two detectives discussing the case over appetising meals), Chabrol plays the genre game with absolute fidelity—desires and frustrations moved over the board like so many pawns—until the inevitable moment when the wife becomes enmeshed in her own cold manoeuvres and is led away to be charged with the murder of the husband whose life she has just tried to save.

The twist, of course, is that when one is able to look back on her story, one realises that this would-be murderess never did anything by

calculation: her instincts ignited in a sort of spontaneous combustion. Metaphysically speaking, Chabrol hints at the relationship underlying his triangle through the emblems associated with each of them: the gold sun medallion worn by the husband round his neck, the kite in the form of an eagle flown by the lover, and the severe black evening-gown favoured by the wife. Icarus, in other words, courts disaster by venturing into the void between the sun god and the queen of the night. More prosaically, Chabrol defines that void as the non-existent love that is sparked into life by the interloper. The almost mannered insistence on the husband's impotent despair as the lover flaunts his animal sexuality—apparently overbalancing in the thriller context—suddenly takes on a new meaning in the bizarre sequence where the husband returns from the dead to take his revenge by insisting on replacing (becoming) the lover. Here affection and lust, fused by the humiliation and pain each feels, create the new emotion between husband and wife that is, in a sense, beyond love.

By the end, as the wife sits alone in an empty house listening to the ghostly voice of her dead husband beckoning her out into a darkness fitfully illuminated by the glow from a distant lighthouse, one has come startlingly close to Giraudoux' elegy: 'Purity is not of this world, but once in ten years its light shines briefly.' In her, all those Forties ladies who ruthlessly schemed and paid the penalty without our ever catching a glimpse of the tender underlay beneath the glittering sheath, are given a new deal.

Rather more conventional but equally enjoyable, *Farewell, My Lovely* makes no bones about its salute to nostalgia. John A. Alonzo, the cameraman who brought *Chinatown* round full circle into dark mystery by pouring on more light, here embalms Philip Marlowe's sleazy Los Angeles haunts in an amber shroud penetrated only hazily by the scarlet neon signs of sin. Robert Mitchum (a stroke of casting genius as it turns out) tucks his weary disillusionment, only a trifle double-chinned, cosily back into the soft felt hat and shabby trenchcoat that RKO have clearly been keeping in mothballs for him all these years. And there is even a devoted *hommage* to the montage sequence, endearingly old-fashioned even when it first appeared in the Dmytryk version, where Marlowe—'A pool of darkness opened at my feet. I dived into it. It had no bottom' (lines

The female of the species. Romy Schneider in 'Innocents with Dirty Hands'



curiously omitted here)—struggled against a drug-induced nightmare.

For a time, despite the odd silly mistake (Moose Malloy's first approach to Marlowe is shot so that Marlowe looks the bigger of the two, making nonsense of his wry comment, 'A hand I could have sat in took hold of my shoulder'), atmosphere and performances are so right that one simply sits back and wallows. One has, admittedly, to still occasional doubts. Marlowe starts off, for instance, not in pursuit of a runaway Greek barber, but of a runaway teenage girl who loves dancing (chance for a picturesque dance hall scene with period band, singer and hairdos) and who is restored to her ungracious parents (allowing a hint of generation gap); and when he is dragged by Moose into the coloured bar in search of Velma, a totally irrelevant piano with a girl sprawling voluptuously atop it has been added in the interests of 'atmosphere'.

Though studied, this atmosphere is nevertheless both attractive and right, exactly capturing Chandler's view of glossy urban corruption sliding irrecoverably into decay: a gaudy, busy night-life for and by people already all too clearly on the skids and glimpsed, several years later as it were, in Marlowe's brushes with the bleakly despairing lives of the ex-trumpeter and ex-dancer (lovely performances by Walter McGinn and Sylvia Miles respectively) who die in the wake of his quest for Velma. It is only when these slight overstatements begin to mount up, magnified by subtle changes in perspective, that the doubts begin to matter.

The first of these changes is that the main body of the story is told as a narrative flashback, with Marlowe holed up in a dingy hotel room, wanted for seven murders, assailed on all sides, and pouring out his tale of woe to his friend Lt. Nulty (John Ireland). A peculiarly 1940s gimmick anyway, the device fits unobtrusively into Chandler's framework, while at the same time justifying the presence of Mitchum as we first see Marlowe, cigarette dangling and whisky glass in hand, staring moodily from a window with the neon signs flickering across his face as he mutters, 'This past spring was the first time I felt tired and realised I was getting old...'

Perfectly acceptable since the part fits Mitchum like a glove, and since Chandler himself was to let the sprightly Marlowe of *Farewell, My Lovely* slither that way later on in *The Little Sister* and *The Long Goodbye*. David Zelag Goodman's otherwise excellent script,

unfortunately, cannot resist the temptation to compound this Marlowe for the Seventies with a number of fashionable sentimentalities. The aforesaid ex-trumpeter, for instance, ruined himself by taking a black wife; Nulty, the broken-down hack, is transformed by friendship into a hero willing to defy the Establishment; Marlowe worships Joe DiMaggio, obviously as an idol (unlike himself) fit for all-American boys, and rhymes his own bleakest moment with DiMaggio's fall from baseball grace. Least persuasive of all, Marlowe is last seen strolling off, a liberal do-gooder, to deliver the \$2,000 he winds up with to the orphaned son of the trumpeter's mixed marriage.

Scene by scene, none of this is particularly disastrous, given the film's fascinating visual detail and the flow of richly idiosyncratic performances. By reducing Marlowe to stock contemporary dimensions, however, passively recording his disillusionment more often than actively pursuing his investigation, it does tend to splinter the narrative into a series of dislocated fragments designed to illustrate his mood. And the first victim (no fault of Charlotte Rampling's) is Velma, alias Mrs. Grayle, reduced so much in stature—much too busy with his weariness, Marlowe barely responds to her alluring brand of poison—that one rather wonders why Moose Malloy made all the fuss.

TOM MILNE

Jaws

In just 78 days last summer, *Jaws* (CIC), Steven Spielberg's film of Peter Benchley's best-selling novel, grossed nearly \$125 million, surpassing *The Godfather* to become the most profitable movie in history. This record was based on first and second-run domestic rentals only. By the time the film has played out the U.S. and overseas it stands to gross more than a quarter of a billion dollars. That is (still) a great deal of money. Clearly, *Jaws* is not so much a film as a media phenomenon.

Like most movies in its box-office class, this simple story of a shark hunt owes its popularity to a merchandising campaign which—in this now celebrated case—began before the novel had even been written. Peter Benchley approached Doubleday in June 1971 with a four-page outline of a proposed novel about man-

eating sharks. He was a professional writer but had no record as a novelist. Doubleday offered him a \$7,500 advance and he took it. From this point on he worked closely with his editor to fashion a saleable property, and at the same time the editor and the publicity department were working on developing a 'trade' reputation for the book. More than a year after Benchley had received his nominal advance, but still well before publication of the hardcover edition, Doubleday was able to sell paperback rights for \$575,000—and *Jaws* was on its way. Richard Zanuck and David Brown bought screen rights while the book was in galleys, gambling that they could produce the film quickly enough to release it while the novel was still at the crest of its popularity. Production took twice as long as expected (*Jaws* was shot mainly on Martha's Vineyard, a popular resort island off Cape Cod, in the summer of 1974) and cost double the amount budgeted; but Zanuck and Brown were in luck, for the novel managed to cling to the best-seller lists longer than expected.

The result was an audience carefully prepared over a period of three years for the 'ultimate experience' of the *Jaws* property: the film. Yet, although this heavy advance publicity virtually guarantees a profit for film-makers (which is why Hollywood is becoming increasingly oriented towards the large-budget, pre-sold adventure movie), it certainly of itself does not mean that records will necessarily be set. *Jaws'* singular financial performance is ultimately a matter of the craft of the film-makers involved. Not the art, the craft. *Jaws* is an extraordinarily well made entertainment. At one point Hooper, the ichthyologist (Richard Dreyfuss), describes the beautiful simplicity of the fish: 'All this machine does is swim and eat and make little sharks—and that's it!' The film has the same intriguing simplicity. There isn't an ounce of dead wood in it; it is the sum total of thousands of 'effects' (special and otherwise) tested and tuned to produce the desired response in the audience. *Jaws* is a landmark of modern cinematic engineering.

It is, therefore, something like the ultimate Hollywood movie. Not only does it represent the tradition of film as entertainment product (as opposed to film as personal statement), but it is also, like many memorable Hollywood entertainments of the past, an example of 'film as a contact sport.' Watching it one is aware that, as Howard Hawks once said in another context, 'that stuff's good, and that stuff's hard to do.' It doesn't matter what it means; in this kind of film-making the relevant question is, does it work? *Jaws* works.

Benchley and co-scenarist Carl Gottlieb, working with Spielberg, first simplified further the already elementary structure of the novel. Out went the subplots, several characters, and the sex. Nothing was to interfere with the central 'effect': Man versus shark. They decided on a three-act structure: let the shark win the first couple of rounds; pause to develop a human drama; then let Man come back for an epic struggle. The first act is simply a matter of building suspense, and Spielberg has studied Hitchcock well; most of it depends not on the presence of the shark but on the threat of its presence, and this section of the film reads like a catalogue (or a parody) of Hitchcock's masterful technical grammar.

The first day on the beach after the shark has made his presence known is the best example of this (and probably the best sequence of the film). Brody (Roy Scheider) watches tensely as the Islanders frolic in the surf. He wants to close the beaches but the mayor has overruled him. Everything is quiet for the moment. Shot of a fat lady. Shot of a kid having fun on his rubber raft with his dog. Shot of a mother and children. Then the shots get progressively closer. Spielberg shoots with a long lens to blur the background and further increase the claustrophobia of each shot. The rhythm picks up. Shots of Scheider searching the water for the

'Jaws': Robert Shaw sights the enemy



telltale fin punctuate the action, each of them cut off by a character walking between Scheider and the camera to intensify our disorientation. Then a carefully planned sequence of false alarms: a black object in the water—the shark?—no, a woman in a black bathing cap emerges from the surf. A scream—no, just some teenagers horsing around. Finally the attack. In good Hitchcockian fashion we see not the attack itself but Scheider's reaction to it. Spielberg uses three track/reverse-zoom shots like the famous tower shot from *Vertigo* to convey Scheider's own terror. Later in the film 'Bruce' (the name the crew gave the mechanical shark who is the real star of the picture) will eat Robert Shaw whole in one gulp in full view—that shot, which was infinitely more difficult to film than the *Vertigo* zoom, is also considerably less effective. There's a lesson there.

We can skip the second act. Benchley and company have borrowed their dramatic complications from Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*—the money-grubbing business men insist on keeping the beaches open; only our hero wants to close them. The third act is the heart of the film: Scheider, Shaw and Dreyfuss alone at sea in a quaint old fishing boat duelling with the Great White Shark. Here, too, much of the effect is due not to the presence of the shark itself but to the sense of its presence. Filming these scenes took more than three months and doubled the cost of the picture: there was trouble with 'Bruce'; at one point the main set—the boat—sank; and there were the weather and the sea to deal with. But the real success, even here, is a matter of editing. Verna Fields cut *Jaws* masterfully, and it is the rhythms of the film more than its subject matter that produce the desired effect in the audience.

One important clue that this is true lies with the subject matter itself. Sharks may be vicious but they are also very dumb. But 'Bruce' has met his match in the foolhardy trio of Hooper, Quint and Brody; and that we don't notice how dumb our heroes are is a compliment to editing which creates suspense where impatience should reign. There are easy ways to kill sharks; exploding harpoons, for example, are so efficient that they have decimated the world's population of whales and brought several species to the point of extinction. Assuming that Quint and associates prefer to be more sporting, one is still surprised at their tribulations. As it happens, the record for Great Whites is held by Capt. Frank Mundus of Montauk Point, New York, who harpooned a 17-foot, two-ton specimen back in 1964. He brought it in within five hours aided only by a middle-aged woman who works in publishing and who had never driven a boat before. The two of them quite enjoyed the experience. But who wants to watch two middle-aged people having fun with a fish? That's reality. And in reality Los Angeles has not been destroyed by earthquakes, Japan has not sunk, and 110-story buildings do not burn to cinders overnight. How boring.

JAMES MONACO

Dog Day Afternoon

On August 22, 1972 at about 3 p.m., when the temperature in New York hovered around the debilitating mark of 97 degrees, the all-news radio stations began carrying the first reports of an intriguing story. At a small branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank at Avenue P and 3rd Street in the wilds of Brooklyn a robbery was in progress. A not unusual occurrence, except that this time the two young men who were holding a dozen or so employees and customers at bay had a special purpose in mind. The leader, 'Littlejohn' Wojtowicz, wanted the money to finance a sex-change operation for his (then) male wife.

The small branch didn't have enough cash



'Dog Day Afternoon': Al Pacino

on hand and an alarm had been tripped, as well, so Littlejohn and his accomplice Sal found themselves trapped. They rather smartly turned to the media in an attempt to salvage the caper, and for the next few hours the city was treated to a diverting series of episodes in the continuing saga of Sal, Littlejohn, his wife Ernie (who was brought to the scene direct from a hospital bed in order to plead with him), his mother, and his first wife Carmen, the mother of his two children. The story ended abruptly later that night when Sal was shot dead and Littlejohn taken into custody. But for several hours the two amateur bank robbers had held the attention of the city with the kind of pseudo-event that radio stations (and TV stations as well, now that they have lightweight portable video cameras which permit instant coverage of such stories) have learned to love.

It was inevitable that the Littlejohn saga would find its way into the complex web of fiction that feeds on events such as these, and indeed it has—magazine story, novel, reams of newspaper copy, and now Sidney Lumet's film from Frank Pierson's screenplay. The film started out as an exploitation vehicle with the title 'Boys in the Bank' and it was with such prospects in mind that producers Martin Bregman and Martin Elfand were able to sell the project to Warner Brothers with Al Pacino (a dead ringer for Littlejohn, by the way) as star.

But the script underwent drastic revisions just before and during shooting and the result, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Columbia-Warner), is a film rather far from the condescending parody one might have expected. The producers might have ripped off the real-life characters financially (they bought rights to the story for pitifully small amounts; suits and countersuits are now flying thick and fast), but Pierson and Lumet have come up with a movie of surprising wit, humour and understanding.

Lumet has always done his best work on location in New York. He seems to come alive in the city, and the half dozen or so films he has made here rank among the best New York movies of the last fifteen years. Lumet the bad is responsible for pompous symbolic dramas like *The Pawnbroker* and *The Hill* (or at best weighty, sluggish translations from the stage, like *A View from the Bridge* and *The Seagull*). Lumet the good, however, has evinced an unmatched feel for the rhythms of New York

City in such films as *Bye Bye Braverman*, *The Anderson Tapes*, *Serpico* (despite its serious ideological problems) and *The Group*.

In its understanding of the way people talk, act and think in the city, *Dog Day Afternoon* is striking: a veritable sociological data bank. Lumet can draw more out of talented actors like John Cazale, Sully Boyar, Carol Kane, Marcia Jean Kurtz, James Broderick, Charles Durning and Chris Sarandon than just about any other director working today. There is a real sense here of the subtle, non-verbal modes of communication between people that so fascinate anthropologists these days. It may be difficult to give examples of these shrewd successes of the actor's art in print, but the effect is clear and striking on screen. Especially when photographed by the remarkable Victor J. Kemper, one of the most judicious and intelligent cinematographers at work today.

But *Dog Day Afternoon*, despite (or rather because of) these simple pleasures, has more to say. Frank Pierson's script describes a state of mind and a state of politics that is absolutely right for the time and place of the film, even if it hasn't yet been articulated in print. Gradually but surely, Littlejohn and Sal yield centre stage as our attention is turned to the two groups that surround them: the hostages inside the bank and the crowd of spectators who gather outside to participate in the media event. The scenes within the bank reveal a knowledge of 'victimology', the psychology of the victims in situations like these. As the bank manager and his staff get to know the very nervous kid who has broken their routine they tend to identify with him, to see things from his perspective. They slowly realise that the police and the FBI outside have as their first priority not the preservation of the hostages' lives but the preservation of an ideal of social order. Outside the bank, meanwhile, Lumet captures not only the air of festivity (this is an event after all) but also the felt undercurrent of political discontent. Sonny exploits this (in a brilliant scene) by chanting the one-word slogan 'Attica!' at the cops, a refrain that is quickly picked up by the restless crowd.

Not to suggest that the politics of *Dog Day Afternoon* are as simplistic as that slogan. The crowd, rooting for Sonny (Littlejohn in the film) during the afternoon, quickly turn on him when they find out that he's gay. (Then the gay activists turn up with placards to make

political capital of the event.) The police, meanwhile, have their own problems. Moretti (Charles Durning) is chief of the hostage squad of the N.Y.P.D. He knows his business and he has a sense of the forlornness of situations like these. Sheldon (James Broderick), on the other hand, heads the FBI squad and is full of a supercilious contempt for the local cop's sensibilities. I've met several FBI agents in years past. I've always been fascinated by the supercilious macho air they all seem to carry with them, a complicated persona that broadcasts a sense of power, nonchalance and sexual energy. They must learn it in training school. But I've never seen this very precise, easily recognisable attitude portrayed on the screen before. It's one of the small pleasures of *Dog Day Afternoon*, which when taken together give the film an honest vitality as well as a rather sophisticated if low-key political sense.

JAMES MONACO

Hester Street

Shelf upon shelf of autobiographical novels have been written about the experiences of American immigrants, yet American movies have always treated the subject circumspectly—mindful perhaps of the general ruling that a mass entertainment medium should avoid depicting one segment of the community at the expense of any other. During the first 'new wave' of Jewish writers in the 1930s, hard core Yiddishers were occasionally provided with their own movie fare in their own language (such as Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Singing Blacksmith*—a musical tale of *shtetl* life in the old country); but mainstream movies generally used the immigrants' ghetto existence only as a suitable background for turn of the century stories about corrupt politicians or the early sequences in showbiz biographies (before the bright lights took over). Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* (Connoisseur)—an independent production made in New York—finally takes the bull by the horns, dealing solely (if hardly exhaustively) with life on New York's Lower East Side in 1896.

Its proportions and virtues are modest: it offers no labyrinthine saga of rags to riches to rags, no outside characters flaunting their ethnic identity like a flag, no lashings of local colour. The narrative is dangerously slender, propelling a handful of ordinary characters along a well signposted road. Sweat-shop worker Jake, a

Russian Jew with three years experience of being a Yankee, cringes at the greenhorn ways of his wife Gitl, brought over from the old country on her father's death. The marriage falls apart and a divorce follows; Jake changes partners for the attractive and worldly Polish Jew Mamie, while Gitl slyly robs Mamie of her accumulated nest egg, planning to set up a grocery store with the shy scholarly Bernstein (previously their lodger). The narrative thread of *Yekl*, the book on which the movie is based, is, if anything, slenderer. Written in 1896 by Abraham Cahan (for over fifty years editor of America's leading Jewish newspaper, the *Jewish Daily Forward*), it was seemingly concocted chiefly for non-immigrant readers: footnotes explain Yiddish expressions and customs, and characters' dialogue is transcribed with academic precision (their Yiddish outpourings are presented in English, but with the fractured English intrusions printed in italics). The plot, moreover, serves as a compact primer in the Americanisation of the immigrant Jew, stressing the impossibility of maintaining sacred habits and taboos in 'educated' New York.

The movie, likewise, has the qualities of a primer—stressing the same points repeatedly, presenting scenes crisply with few directorial distractions. Certainly, its perspective is limited: the important confrontation between immigrant communities with rival communities or America's white aristocracy is completely neglected (as Gitl observes, 'The Gentiles keep in another place, heh?'). Yet *Hester Street* covers its chosen ground with great skill and sensitivity. Had it been shot in colour, things perhaps would be different, but Kenneth Van Sickle's radiant black and white photography evokes the ghetto environment without lapsing into picture postcard prettiness. We see the bare-bricked sweat-shop, the claustrophobic living quarters (Mamie's bedroom is shared with many other mattresses), the 'dancing academy' with its lounging chess-players, glasses of tea and appalling standards of hygiene (a waiter pushes an unappetising pasty on to a plate with his finger, before flinging down a fork drawn from an inside pocket).

Hester Street itself is thronged with stalls offering furniture, hats, violins, poultry, cloth, books, baubles, bagels and beads; perhaps horse-and-carts trundle by too often, yet it remains a living street rather than a film set. The characters seem equally natural; the credits list a 'dialogue coach', but the cast (all fresh, unknown faces) master the Yiddish effusions and the gauche attempts at American slang ('Don't like it—lump it!') without strain. Gestures and mannerisms are caught with the same precision—Gitl's wide-eyed looks and shy inclinations of the head, Jake's hearty vicious laughter, the divorce lawyer's grimaces of mock-despondency as Gitl holds out for more and more money.

GEOFF BROWN

LONDON FESTIVAL

Although we go to press too early to report on the 1975 London Festival in any detail, three films first shown at the Festival are reviewed here—Theodor Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players*, John Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence*, and David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village*.

The Travelling Players

History is theatre, but history intrudes on theatre, stops the performance, changes the cast. The travelling players never finish their play. *Golfo the Shepherdess*, with its painted backcloth of sheep and mountains, belongs to the past, and the present keeps breaking in. But

how could a Greek film, made astride the fall of the colonels, come to terms with the present? In Greece last summer, on the day the verdicts were announced in the trial of the colonels, a Greek told me that if the government did not execute these men he would strangle them with his bare hands. It was an exaggeration born of seven years of despair, and reflected the sense of uncertain identity which is the understandable mood of a people delivered from seven years of a fascist junta into a political present in which democracy is by no means assured in the country of its birth.

So in *The Travelling Players* the Greek present is the recent past, the country's history from 1939 to 1952. They were turbulent years: the quasi-fascist regime of Metaxas, the Italian invasion, the German occupation, the British intervention, a bitter civil war, and the rise to power of the 'strong' government of Papagos, heralding an unsettled period which culminated in the colonels' coup in 1967. Theodor Angelopoulos' marathon film, much of it—astonishingly—shot while the colonels were still in power, chronicles these events as they involve a troupe of actors travelling the country with their rustic play.

The theatrical metaphor, effortlessly varied and brilliantly sustained, is both the framework for the film and the opportunity for its series of oppositions between theatre and history. The metaphor is most obviously stated in the several scenes in which real, off-stage events interrupt the actors' performance. The Italian invasion of 1940, for instance, which is announced from the stage. Noises off indicate panic in the audience as air-raid sirens begin to wail; but the camera remains fixed on the empty stage, which is illuminated by flashing lights to suggest the bombs falling outside the theatre.

In this sequence, reality impinges on the actors in their role as actors: war is announced, the play stops. In two later sequences the situation is precisely reversed. Suspected of harbouring a British soldier during the German occupation, the actors are forced by the Gestapo to prove their own identities by confirming themselves as actors; stiffly, they line up on the stage and each recites a few lines from the play. Their second performance under duress is for the benefit of the British, allies turned interventionists when the non-monarchist forces in the Greek army of liberation refuse to lay down their arms. Walking along a beach, the company is stopped by a British patrol, who are amused to have stumbled on actors in this unlikely setting and ask them to perform, the platoon commander indicating his friendly intention by reciting a line of Homer. The performance is then reciprocated, as the British officer swaps his cap for an actor's hat, everybody dances to the tune of 'Roll out the Barrel', and the soldiers offer a rendition of 'Tipperary' to the bemused but diplomatically appreciative Greeks. But this is another interrupted performance. 'Off-stage' a shot is heard; soldiers and actors scatter. And again Angelopoulos holds the camera on the makeshift stage as a soldier falls dead over the red cloth which has served as an impromptu curtain.

This fixed, frontal perspective is the film's principal formal device. The actors are acted upon by events, and the camera is as it were the audience (the actual audience for the play is never seen). But the space between the audience and the actors is also occupied in several sequences by the actors themselves. The actors are spectators, for instance, of the start of the fighting between the partisans of the left and the monarchists of the right, which eventually precipitated the civil war. Angelopoulos films this sequence in one long take (as he does several other sequences). We see the actors in a square at night. The camera then occupies a position in the middle of the square (and in front of the actors) as the two sides, in turn, advance into the street running across the top of the square



—the 'stage', in fact. The communists retreat, off-screen left; more firing; then, after a lull, British troops enter the square from the right, but at a slightly different angle from the rightist troops—a beautifully succinct representation of the disastrous ambiguity of the British intervention. This almost choreographed sequence is only one of several echoes of Jancsó: a tableau of complex action, both literally and figuratively distanced, within a single space.

The distance, denying normal dramatic identification and unsettling expectations about characters and events, finds more than a visual expression since *The Travelling Players* works on a number of levels, which frequently overlap. At one level there is the question of identity. The actors are not so much characters in their own right as emblems of the Greek people during this period of their history. There are degrees of involvement—the older members of the company are background figures—but all the actors are implicated in the off-stage events, as is suggested by the group portrait which begins and ends the film at the same place but at a distance in time of thirteen years. (The film is shot mainly in chronological sequence, but occasionally a lateral movement of the camera within a sequence indicates a movement forwards or backwards in time.) Conditioned, realist expectations are additionally confused by the realisation that the actors are also the figures of Atridean myth, and thus emblematic in a general sense of a central tradition of Greek culture—just as their play, a popular folk drama, represents the period in Greek history when the people were passive spectators of events. The two younger actresses are Electra and Chrysothemis; Agamemnon, their father, is betrayed and executed during the German occupation; Orestes returns from the partisan war in the mountains to avenge his father's death by killing Clytemnestra and her lover Aegistheus. Again, it is during a performance that this revenge is enacted. Orestes, in uniform, walks on stage, and myth and reality merge as he fires his revolver and the audience applauds this unexpected additional scene.

Time and again the theatrical artifice alters the perspective. Electra goes to a hotel with a man in the black uniform of fascism, and after resisting his clumsy advances tells him to take off his clothes. As he does so, the camera watches from Electra's point of view, until the perspective is reversed as she turns and leaves



'The Travelling Players'

the room, leaving the man standing naked and ludicrous. This scene, like several others, has a direct antithetical link with another scene: Electra's act is a symbolic revenge for her mother's earlier mockery of Agamemnon in uniform. It corresponds also to the scene in which Chrysothemis strips for a Greek collaborator during the German occupation, the camera watching her from behind the man as she sings a song to accompany his masturbation. The opposition is between active and passive, involvement and complicity. Electra humiliates a man as an act of revenge; her sister, who will later go off with British soldiers and marry an American, allows herself to be humiliated for the sake of a bottle of wine.

There are more direct reflections of the theatre in, for instance, the masks worn by the men who rape Electra to force her into revealing her brother's whereabouts. The sequence which follows is an example of the film's most basic distancing device. Dumped by a river, Electra lifts herself up, turns to the camera, and

delivers a long monologue about the month-long battle of Athens in December 1944, when British troops put down a communist uprising. This direct address to the camera, like the two other monologues in the film (Agamemnon describing the aftermath of the Greek expulsion from Asia Minor in 1922, and Pylades recounting his imprisonment and torture at the end of the civil war), serves both to situate the events in their sequence and to amplify the actors' participation in those events.

But it would be misleading to stress the formal aspects of Angelopoulos' method at the expense of the film's seductive surface, though that in itself is an element of the form. Whole sequences stay in the mind, even after one viewing. An extraordinary scene, for instance, in which the camera follows the company as they walk down a mountain road in winter and their singing is brought to a halt as a bend in the road reveals two bodies hanging from a tree—a sequence which ends with a stunning overhead shot as the actors descend on a solitary, incongruous chicken in a snow-swept field, an effectively simple metaphor for the famine which ravaged Greece during the war. Or the exhilaration of the sequence representing the liberation, as mounted partisans sweep across the ruins of a cliff-top fortress. Credit due to the camerawork of George Arvanitis, who also photographed Angelopoulos's previous films, *The Reconstruction* and *Days of 36*. What these films, excellent as they were, had not suggested was that Angelopoulos would go on to make a masterpiece of modern cinema, a film reverberating with metaphor and meaning.

DAVID WILSON

'The Travelling Players': encounter on the beach with the British army



A Woman Under the Influence

Strangely, for a director who first made his name with a semi-underground style of filmmaking, imposing spontaneous combinations of variously improvised performances on narrative cinema, John Cassavetes' movies have been increasingly inclined to box themselves in closed situations. In fact, the dominant motif of his later films has been the restless battering, within predicaments of social and personal impasse, of the very energies that his way of working with actors seems designed to unleash. The development can be seen as part and parcel of his adaptation to more conventional kinds of

narrative, and the removal of his improvisational restlessness from the rootless world of urban youth to more solid middle-class settings. For Cassavetes, the new environment has become as much an obsessive area for study (disguising his moral tales as shaggy-dog stories) as it has for Chabrol. But where the latter disturbs the conscience of the bourgeoisie with the kinds of guilts that trickle from *série-noire* thrillers, Cassavetes sees the moral problem as one of adjustment to others, of being true to one's own energies without being caught in a double-bind: neither imposing, nor being imposed upon by patterns of compulsive behaviour.

His method of elaborating the problem has also been steadily refined, with the focus of interest being perceptibly narrowed from film to film: from the quasi-communities of *Shadows* and *Faces* to the select male group in *Husbands*, the couple in *Minnie and Moskowitz* and, effectively, one individual in *A Woman Under the Influence*. It is as if, in the most recent film, Cassavetes had discovered the perfect Laingian model for a situation that elsewhere he has disguised and diffused with the buzz of so many competing voices. As housewife Mabel, whose more eccentric moods spill over the basic task of keeping home and family together, usually into vague artistic longings (*Swan Lake* being a frequent recourse in moments of stress), Gena Rowlands makes the film her own in one of the most resplendently kooky performances in years. At the same time, Mabel's idiosyncrasy is clearly produced under pressure, a desperate defensive measure before a domestic situation which is almost wilfully devoid of intimacy or repose, her husband Nick (Peter Falk) filling the house at every opportunity with gangs of friends, relatives or work-mates and becoming aggressively alarmed as her behaviour grows more wayward.

The danger is that in moving from the situations of his earlier films, where assertions of the right to be oneself were thrust upon virtually everyone, to the present predicament in which Mabel is the put-upon free spirit, Cassavetes reduces his other characters to the unconsciously controlling demons, and caricatures, of Laingian psychology. Falk at times drifts into a role similar to that of René Auberjonois in *Images*, and the least interesting scenes are those in which he is apart from his wife. A nagging element of caricature also hangs over the film in relation to its social comedy and the kind of *All in the Family* working class stereotype to which some American critics have objected. Water maintenance engineer Nick is too boorish and insensitive to see his wife's little extravagances—conducting a children's party in the spirit of Isadora Duncan, or becoming so fascinated with the gondolier's song issuing from the mouth of a Negro workman that her attention begins to look like a sexual overture—as anything other than embarrassing social outrages and symptoms of mental unbalance.

As with all Cassavetes' work, moreover, the sheer grandstanding effort which evidently goes into his actors' attempts to bore down to a bedrock of emotional truth detracts to a degree from what they find. But an element of insulation, and a further level of irony, in *Woman Under the Influence* is the way in which performing becomes part of its subject. As the frightened and incredulous Nick increasingly finds himself unable either to tame or soothe his wife, he as frequently doubts that she is just play-acting in some insane bid for attention as that she is actually going mad. And throughout the movie, Mabel conducts games and provocations, beginning with her drunken pick-up of a stranger, after being left alone by Nick on a promised night-out ('If you're trying to punish me with him, or him with me, then forget it' announces her disgruntled companion the morning after), and proceeding through the children's party fiasco and her frequent dying



'Requiem for a Village'

swan imitations—all designed both to dramatise and purge her clamouring dissatisfactions.

The best scenes in the film, and among the sharpest and funniest that Cassavetes has produced, are those which give Mabel ample room to stage her own discontented ballet before a bewildered audience. The culmination is her homecoming after a six-month stay in a mental institution, when Nick has predictably packed the house with family and friends, and Mabel's shock at finding herself surrounded by exactly the kind of disapproving concern that packed her off in the first place eventually leads her to a devious but steadily more embarrassing mime of her real need to be left alone. Nick's final anguished attempt to soothe everybody's feelings, insisting to his wife 'There's nothing you can do wrong. Just be yourself,' is the film's last ironic assertion of the double-bind politics of every relationship. Of all the selves she could be, the one he least recognises and admits as real is the one in front of him.

RICHARD COMBS

Requiem for a Village

David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* (BFI), 68 minutes in colour, is a search for the past contained perhaps in the present, and what it shows of life in a Suffolk village a generation ago is so breathtakingly beautiful that audiences can be forgiven for regarding the film as primarily an idealisation of an age that has gone. There is of course an element of this in it, but to sum up the film in such a way is really to blind yourself to everything original about it. The point is that the film is not a statement. Statements are best made in other ways than this. It is something altogether more fluid and impressionistic—an attempt, as I see it, to show the co-existence of all things in time.

The idea is the sort that could easily have been jogged out of existence by the conscious effort to pin it down. Poetic endeavour is never happening in the abstract. It is an attempt to do something new with practical materials that are already there. In the case of films these materials are very expensive, and in financing large-scale experiments of this and other kinds in recent years, the BFI Production Board is suddenly, unobtrusively, performing a function quite comparable in many ways to that of Grierson in the heyday of the British documentary movement.

It is always possible to write about a film without reference to its director's earlier work, but it can be unhelpful, particularly in a case like Gladwell's where almost everything he has been doing in relative obscurity points so clearly in the same direction. Gladwell was trained at art school, and seems always to have *thought* visually. The cartoon film would have been his first choice had opportunities in that field been less sparse. He made a 9.5 mm. amateur film while he was still at school. It was about a youth proposing marriage, being rejected, contemplating suicide and recovering his spirits: the clump of daffodils in full bloom at the beginning is withered at the end—the first manifestation of a preoccupation with the circular theme of decay and regeneration! He still has the script for this and it is drawn as much as written, for there are rough sketches of every shot. His second film, *A Summer Discord* (still in BFI distribution), was made while he was still at art school. A little girl has a black mood that cuts her off from other people and almost deprives her of a special experience. The ways in which mental isolation is shown range from Russian influenced editing techniques (e.g. straight cuts to the scolding mouth and neck of her mother) to whole fantasy set-ups (e.g. a playpen-type cage in which the child is enclosed in the middle of a field). Slow motion, speeded-up motion and colour are used to heighten the effect of the fantasy sequence.

Miss Thompson Goes Shopping was completed with money from the BFI Experimental Fund and shown at the NFT in 1958. It was inspired by a poem of the same title by Martin Armstrong, but although it is a sound film (Gladwell's first) the poem is never quoted. Instead we have a new entity with similarly gentle and mildly humorous qualities, and the vitality of perception that distinguished the best Free Cinema films. For Miss Thompson—who goes shopping in a sensible coat and a considerable hat which, judging by the summer dresses of the younger people in the streets, have little bearing on the temperature of that particular day—the big moment is the purchase of a pair of slippers, much too dear. Everything in the film is strange and interesting, almost as if we had never looked at another human being's life before, but Miss Thompson's moment of decision is perhaps strangest and most interesting because there we somehow take a jump ahead of her. We are looking at the street she is passing along—a row of hoardings behind the pavement, an old car parked on the kerb in

front—and we know what's going to happen. We meet the joke halfway, as it were. Moments of heightened consciousness (sad or funny) often have the feeling of being outside time.

In *28b Camden Street* (1963) Gladwell is beginning to make the logical connection between his preoccupation with the theme of destruction and regeneration, and his opportunity as a film-maker to dissociate it from time. His subject is a group of artists who are living in studios about to be demolished and rebuilt. The narrative form has been abandoned altogether and our only contact with present reality is provided by the voice of sculptor Peter Peri soliloquising with matter-of-fact eloquence about past, present and future. Meanwhile materials like wood, metal, stone—the sculptors' materials as well as the fabric of the buildings that surround them—are being built up, knocked down, shaped, reshaped, shifted, carried in, carted out, totally transformed—all without reference to any orthodox time scale. Things are only apparently destroyed, always continue to exist in one form or another. The way they look is inseparable from the moment they are looked at—except on film which can show a reality never actually *seen* in any other way.

An Untitled Film, financed by the BFI in 1964 and photographed entirely in slow motion, slows down the passage of time sufficiently to show from various angles the detail of a single moment of initiation, the moment in a farmyard when a boy watches a hen's neck being wrung. The slow motion photography gives a different perspective on space as well as time, searches out the hidden pattern that momentarily fuses everything together: parts of people, parts of animals, sections of the general scene, leaves being swept into a pyre and burnt, smoke drifting. The sound for this and *28b Camden Street* is *musique concrète* by Ernest Berk. About six years later Gladwell made a similar ten-minute film, *Demolition*, which was shown on BBC-TV who sponsored it as a pilot for a possible series that never materialised. But *Demolition* was more abstract, lacking a basic idea as strong as that of *An Untitled Film*. The

next real jump forward was to come with *Requiem for a Village*.

The idea for a film about a village had been on Gladwell's mind since at least 1958. People remember him talking about it when he first came to London in the Free Cinema days. It is important, I think, to know that what started him off on this was not nostalgia for anything familiar to himself. It was, on the contrary, the sight of the new towns spreading across the country and in their progress replacing, burying—what? At the outset he had no precise notion of what was disappearing underneath, and thought he would have to project his village in conventionally narrative terms of 'characters' who made up its life. His earliest attempt to write a script was along these lines—a strictly literary effort. After writing several versions in this way, he decided he lacked literary talent and, off and on through the years, tried to find a writer who could put his concept into words. Fortunately nothing came of this search, probably because his own visual ideas (which included a Stanley Spencer-inspired resurrection from the start) were so strong and really always getting stronger. It was not until he read the books of George Ewart Evans, followed by one or two other studies of agricultural life, that he saw the real documentary approach to the subject.

Requiem for a Village begins where Gladwell's idea itself began, on a new housing estate—the ordinary, the everyday, sounds of the radio, motor bikes, fragments of conversation. You gather things have changed. Things do change. The images are changing all the time. It is the ice-cream bell that gives the first intimation of how it really is. Its resonance reaches out to layers of earth, rich layers exposed by tractors simultaneously destroying and uncovering the past; and also to music, abundant music by David Fanshawe, evocative of a once immovable faith. 'God will give you to me again. With joy and gladness for ever. Peace perfect peace.' Most of the words that are sung were taken from tombstones.

The old man tending the graves soliloquises about the people he knew now lying underneath. His words drop inconsequentially out of the

present. It is images, not words, that make all the connections, although sometimes the odd phrase juts out later as if, after all, there had been a link somewhere, like the feeling of *déjà vu*. The images, and their juxtapositions, proclaim the earth, the rape of the earth, the continuity of matter. Slow motion photography (which Gladwell would have liked to use more extensively had the cost not been prohibitive) is capturing the quality of perpetuity that attaches to anything acutely observed. The idea of resurrection is the same thing in reverse. What the mind's eye has seen, quite simply becomes visible. So the past starts to rise up, brushing the gravel from its eyes—the recent past, only a layer below the present, still vivid in people's memories and still fragmentarily surviving. Scenes in the blacksmith's and wheelwright's shops, for instance, are showing the real thing in authentic locations.

In the luminous stillness of a late afternoon the old man is going home. He approaches the cemetery gate with his bicycle—an inescapable moment, his last on earth. You can sense it by its extraordinary and yet ordinary beauty. The motor bikes are speeding silently towards it. The old man steps out in front of them, is dead, and almost instantly rises again. They all get out of their graves, his wife and all the others, children and adults dressed in their Sunday best, and are clasped in the arms of their dear ones. Gladwell has the kind of simplicity from which humour is never entirely absent.

Tractors are still ploughing up the earth. The motor bikes are coming home to the housing estate, but what a different world it is from the one we started at. What disturbances there are beneath. 'Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth/Mirth of those long since under earth/Nourishing the corn.' The similarities of theme with T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which I have repeatedly pushed aside until now, cannot finally be ignored. 'To be conscious,' wrote Eliot, 'is not to be in time.' This was Gladwell's intuitive starting point, and it says much for his ability to stick to the evidence of his senses that his film is illuminated rather than destroyed by the comparison.

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

The Glittering Prizes

from page 29

the experience. The three days start at two o'clock on the first day, rehearsing with cameras till ten. The second two go from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. We record on the evening of the second day, the afternoon and evening of the third. It's very exciting to see the sets on the studio floor for the first time, built more or less as we've imagined them over the past months. Actors often say that in television the director only ever retakes for technical reasons—boom or camera in shot, miscutting or flares from lights. It isn't true in this case. Occasionally, we do a sequence in one take; more often it takes two, sometimes four.

Recording is completed to our satisfaction within minutes of the period we've allotted. Overtime beyond that would be expensive and wreck my budgeting. We're all very jubilant and celebrate till the following day. Two days later we're back in Cambridge for the only film shots of Play 2, with Rob Knights directing these in the morning and Waris directing a sequence in the afternoon that had to be held over from the first play. Three days after that, we read through the second play and Rob begins his three weeks rehearsal. Waris now starts to cast other

parts for the third play and talks to the designer, the lighting man, plans his filming and edits the videotape for the first play. The day before the studio of the second play, I see the assembled first play, *An Early Life*. It's a little long, the end doesn't work too well (but it can be fixed), the film has been badly graded—but the performances are fine, as they seemed to be at run-through stage and recording. Sometimes, when the scenes are cut together, they disappoint or just don't work. Not this time.

Rob's recording goes well. Two days later Waris is filming a night scene of race troubles, supposedly in Notting Hill in 1960. We wouldn't dare do the sequence in Notting Hill itself, but the locals tell us they haven't had as much fun down their street in years. Waris also films in Reading, Hammersmith Hospital and Ealing Studios. The following week he starts rehearsal for Play 3, and we still haven't cast the huge part of Stephen Taylor, the fascist architect. Eric Porter, who doubts if he is old enough, is talked into it at the last moment. And so the pattern of turn and turnabout is established, working on a number of plays at once, the casting of one, the rehearsal of another, the editing of yet another. The quick switches of concentration from one area to the next are quite tiring. 'Consider

it as doing a seven-and-a-half hour movie,' says someone. As I write this, we've just completed the fifth play. Waris has finished his work, Rob is casting the sixth play. We're re-editing the second play slightly before the sound dub it needs. If anything, the budget on all six plays may be a little underspent, though there are no prizes for that, glittering or otherwise.

The actors from earlier episodes come to visit later recordings because they now miss being a part of the series. The difficulties we had with late casting, the problems of getting permission to film inside any factory because our script said it had a colour bar, of getting car windscreens to shatter on cue, bedsprings to creak in the studio without sounding like trains shunting outside a station—all these begin to recede as we approach the end. It's now a matter of how good the plays are as television, because production problems neither justify nor excuse. I start thinking about specific ways of getting people to watch, about publicity, about articles in the papers: there seems a built-in resistance by newspaper editors to taking any television seriously. In that way, it has all the problems that movies had in their earlier days. Perhaps we have to be satisfied that so many people watch, and the hell with permanence and prestige . . . ■

BOOK REVIEWS

KULESHOV ON FILM: Writings by Lev Kuleshov

Selected, translated and edited by
Ronald Levaco

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS,
£5.50 (Paperback, £1.75)

In one sense, as a record of how a brilliant iconoclast was coerced into toeing the Party line, this anthology of Kuleshov's theoretical writings and memoirs (ranging from 1922 to 1968, and here published in English for the first time) is a fascinating historical document. In another, sadly, it lays the ghost of a long-cherished legend. 'We make films—Kuleshov made cinema.' To anyone familiar with the fulsome tributes paid to Kuleshov's influence by such directors as Pudovkin and Eisenstein—not to mention with the wit, intensity and marvellous fantasy of films like *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West*, *The Death Ray* and *By the Law*—the snatches of information that have filtered through histories and critical studies about the Kuleshov Workshop, the Kuleshov Effect, and the Kuleshov theories on typage, bio-mechanics and montage, seemed to indicate a treasure-trove of theoretical wisdom.

The reality, as evidenced by his short book *Art of the Cinema*, published in 1928 and here translated *in toto*, is rather more mundane: a somewhat pedagogical, somewhat repetitive, somewhat naïve account of his excited discovery of the primacy of montage from the study of American films, supported by chapters on how the actor, photography, set design and scenario could best be moulded to the service of montage. Of course, it is hardly fair to expect primitive theorising to make exciting reading after the endless arguments by Bazin (and others) on the relative merits of montage and the *plan-séquence*.

Kuleshov was clearly on to something, laying useful foundations for later semiotic studies, and *Art of the Cinema* springs to life if one bears his own films in mind while reading it. His 'metrical spatial web', for example, evolved from his contention that actions, gestures or even settings were more effective (because more immediately perceptible) when consciously related to the horizontal or perpendicular lines of the frame, is particularly illuminating of the pervasive *angularity* which contributes so radically to the extraordinary intensity of *By the Law*. But Kuleshov was very soon

under pressure to disband his subversive Workshop; at the Congress of Film Workers in January 1935 his work was denounced and he duly 'confessed'; and one looks in vain for any further attempts to analyse the cinema or extend its boundaries. Instead we get an article (written in 1935) denouncing montage in the name of social realism.

Kuleshov, of course, was only one of several talented innovators to be muzzled when the official adherence to Soviet social realism stamped out the creative ferment of the mid-1920s. The irony, as Ronald Levaco points out in his excellent introduction, supporting his contention with a lucid account of their methodology and aims, is that the Formalists—whose researches lay behind everything worthwhile in the early Soviet cinema and who were wiped out as ideologically unsound in the Zhdanovist purges—were in fact directing all their energies towards the creation of a truly materialist art.

The same purpose emerges clearly through every line in Kuleshov's *Art of the Cinema*, with its fanatical determination to strip away all but the bare bones of concrete reality; but by 1935, attributing his error over montage to a failure to realise that capitalist America was cunningly producing an art form to 'console' its downtrodden workers, Kuleshov was simultaneously urging that the 'reality' to be shown on the Soviet screen need not include unpalatable details such as 'a ramshackle peasant hut, a dour coachman, ancient houses, churches, slovenly landscapes, uncomfortable and needless uniforms.' Since those infamous purges are usually laid exclusively at the doors of Stalin and Zhdanov, it is a useful corrective to have Levaco's persuasively argued suggestion, gently denting the 'canonical reverence' in which he is often held, that Lenin may well have been rather less than blameless in the matter.

TOM MILNE

BY A STROKE OF LUCK!

By Donald Ogden Stewart

PADDINGTON PRESS, £4.75

The twists and turns of Donald Ogden Stewart's career have bemused many people—notably, it seems, Donald Ogden Stewart himself, for he writes his autobiography in a mood of continual

wonder and self-mockery. First he pillories his snobbery and urge to make good in society, fostered at Yale. Then he looks on his sudden rise to literary eminence in the 1920s as just a stroke of luck—one of a long series. Following Edmund Wilson's encouragement he finds himself launched as a successful humorist, though he also strives after higher spheres ('I began to read novels and short stories for the purpose of seeing how it was done').

The next stroke of luck occurs when talkies arrive. Like many New Yorkers, Stewart goes west: at the hands of Thalberg he receives his first extensive training in the writer's art and quickly becomes one of MGM's best paid men, eventually winning an Oscar for his *Philadelphia Story* screenplay (which keeps very closely to Philip Barry's original play, as Stewart readily admits). Then in the mid-Thirties comes the major turnaround: he suddenly reaches political maturity and veers sharply left. He resigns from the Tennis and Racquet Club and begins to join leagues (the Anti-Nazi League, the Anti-Franco League). He admires communism in a romantic way, sticks with his beliefs through the Hitler/Stalin pact and manages to escape HUAC investigations—though only by abandoning America. Stewart's narrative falls away, somewhat ungainly, in the early 1950s, with the author happily settled in London after his car runs out of petrol in Regent's Park. 'My life,' he concludes, 'has been for me a successful one and in many ways a happy one. Can one ask for more?'

Such blithe modesty is disarming in one egocentric enough to pen a three-hundred-page history of himself, and it proves the author to be an immensely urbane and sensitive man. It's particularly refreshing to find Hollywood's immersion in leftist politics discussed without the customary acrimony and strident self-righteousness. However, Stewart's admirable qualities have a sadly adverse effect on the book: his breezy nonchalance eventually tries the reader's patience, and the quantity of information and analysis offered is often dangerously small. Stewart isn't one of those blessed with total recall, and his life's events and friendships (the stellar cast includes Benchley, Fitzgerald and Hemingway) never come into clear enough focus. The impression of skimpiness, moreover, is increased by the book's physical production: there are many proofing errors, no index, and a perfunctory gallery of photographs.

Stewart does, however, give a fair bit of information about his own non-Hollywood writings—in particular, his early virulent satire *Aunt Polly's Story of Man-kind* and his serious plays *Emily Brady* (never produced) and *How I Wonder*. All this is valuable, though it must be admitted that *Aunt Polly* now makes very heavy reading, and from the available

evidence the plays seem equally uncongenial—stilted in style and hectoring in their social concerns (faults shared by the movie Stewart is most proud of, the anti-fascist *Keeper of the Flame*). Stewart's purely comic pieces—like his lightweight escapist movies—have fared better; written in the fashionable mode of 'crazy humour' (best exemplified by Benchley and Ring Lardner) they display an attractively manic exuberance, insufficiently caught by the extract Stewart includes from *Mr and Mrs Haddock Abroad*.

GEOFF BROWN

HOLLYWOOD BABYLON

By Kenneth Anger

STRAIGHT ARROW BOOKS, NEW YORK,
\$14.95

'His formula was simple: a well-known name, an unflattering photograph and a story, fairly short, which presented a sordid episode in a mocking humorous manner. He knew what his customers wanted.' Kenneth Anger is here describing the working methods of Robert Harrison, the editor-publisher of that scandal-magazine phenomenon of the American 1950s, *Confidential*. He might, however, well be describing his own newly published 'authorised' edition of *Hollywood Babylon*, long a cult favourite in its original French (1959) and pirated American editions.

Doubtless, at some point in time, gossip becomes social history. The incredibly honest essays of Louise Brooks, in which the peccadilloes of the screen mighties illustrate and illuminate the continuing saga of what it really meant to pursue a film career during Hollywood's heyday, aptly demonstrate that the doings of the stars and directors of the period may well be moving in the direction of Evelyn and Pepsy. Although Anger allows us an occasional glimpse of the working social historian, however, the role does not really much interest him. The remarkable behaviour patterns, for example, of leading studio citizens during the House Un-American Activities Committee witch-hunt of 1947 are allotted only a page and a half, devoted to a mere listing of the names of those who did or did not testify, with a stupefyingly lame conclusion that the result of the investigation was to 'ruin many lives and careers and tarnish the glamour of Tinsel Town.' Socio-political analysis, then, is not Anger's forte.

Nor is there much attention paid to films themselves—this from a director whose own films often enough reflect the Hollywood mythos—apart from some slight asides about the casting preferences of directors like Chaplin and Murnau. Instead, what does pique Anger's ardent interest is the connection between a famous name and sex and drugs. Unfortunately, as gossip, the book offers little which is new to the

well-known stories and scandals it retells. Hitherto unpublished bits appear here and there (details about the bludgeon murder of Ramon Novarro, Albert Dekker's deliberately weird suicide), but the present edition will disappoint fans of the pirated edition, for the writing has been toned down and many of their favourite outrageous bits have been edited out.

Oddly, too, Anger often stops short of 'telling it all' even when particularly juicy details are already more or less common knowledge. Thus some familiar material is dropped from the more than twice-told tale of Lana Turner, and the more bizarre aspects of Jayne Mansfield's gruesome demise are suppressed. At the same time Anger attempts to regalanise our interest in stories which have lost their punch by resorting to the dubious device of rampant inflation. A reproduction of a love letter to William Desmond Taylor from Mary Miles Minter, for example, ends with ten 'x's' (kisses), while Anger's quotation of the same letter in his text gives it no less than eighteen; a minor detail, perhaps, but only one of many which call into question his accuracy.

The new edition is lavishly produced; but this is not necessarily a blessing. Like pornography (of which, after all, Hollywood gossip is a sub-genre), much of the pleasure of reading scandal is dissipated when presented in a deluxe format with a respectably establishment stamp of approval. The lavishness extends to an extraordinary richness of photographs, the majority of them rare. Even here, however, one must beware. A blonde nude, for instance, is sandwiched in among photographs of Jean Harlow, and one is evidently supposed to assume it is a picture of Harlow herself. Yet when one's suspicions are roused because the face is not exactly right for Harlow, one discovers that the photograph is unlabelled.

If there exists a photograph of a star which renders her (for Anger is kinder to men here) unattractive, Anger has found and reproduced it: Judy Garland, Marion Davies, Ginger Rogers, among many others, are all shown to look centuries old. Still after still of the dead is offered up through the book's pages—suicides, heart attacks, drug overdoses, murders, accident victims. As if one photograph of the Mansfield accident were not sufficiently nauseous, we are tossed the book's crowning morbidity, this time accurately labelled: 'Jayne Mansfield's Dead Dog'. None of this, of course, is 'in the best of taste', but the very question of taste is irrelevant here anyway. What bothers one about the book finally is the self-righteous tone of Mr. Anger, who condemns 'legitimate' scandal-mongers like Louella and Hedda while mongering with undisguised glee material far more lubricious and sordid than anything those Tinsel Town Munchausens dared to fabricate.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

Letters

Music for Drifters

SIR,—May I make one small correction to Elizabeth Sussex' interesting piece on Cavalcanti?

If Grierson was offended by Cavalcanti putting 'Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave* over *Drifters*' he must have changed his ideas. When I first worked for him in 1929–30 one of my jobs was to arrange gramophone record accompaniments to showings of *Drifters* at the Imperial Institute cinema. Here *Fingal's Cave* was used with Grierson's full approval; in fact he never pretended to know much about music and usually deferred to the opinions of others. Incidentally, *Fingal's Cave* fits several sequences of *Drifters* like a glove.

Yours faithfully,

BASIL WRIGHT

Henley-on-Thames

Cavalcanti

SIR,—Elizabeth Sussex is always illuminating, but one hopes that she will be tolerant of those who find a studied exploration of the relationship between Grierson and Cavalcanti a fruitless exercise.

Mr. Cavalcanti ought not to grieve for his reputation, for it has always been scrupulously and affectionately protected. Had it not been for Sir Michael Balcon and John Grierson, the Massacre of the Innocents might have been a drastic affair. Innocence demands a taxing form of stewardship, and occasionally the stewards need a word or two of support.

We have known highly civilised Europeans other than Mr. Cavalcanti, and John Grierson was one of them. Throughout his lifetime, he bore with zest and courage that sense of purpose and intellectual discipline which alone could secure a continuity of sponsorship for the young tyros who had learned so much from Mr. Cavalcanti. Grierson was not 'quite a demagogue', as Mr. Cavalcanti asserts, because he thought *Fingal's Cave* an inappropriate score. One would have thought that such a shrewd sense of judgment proved him quite a producer.

No one in the National Film Board ever found Grierson with a 'bitter attitude', nor was there anything 'very peculiar' in the alleged suppression of films with which Mr. Cavalcanti had been associated.

It is true that Grierson shared Paul Rotha's doubts about *Film and Reality*, but it was not 'suppressed'. On the contrary, we quarried its partly exotic sources like polar bears falling on the remains of the Franklin Expedition, for we were far removed from art, if not from innocence.

Autobiography of a Princess

Also Being the Adventures of an American Film Director in the Land of the Maharajas

Compiled by JAMES IVORY

A film maker's response in print to Royal India, land of the Maharajas, in which James Ivory describes his travels and work when shooting the films set in Royal India: *Shakespeare Wallah*, *The Guru* and *Autobiography of a Princess*. The book also contains the film script by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and many spectacular 19th century photographs of the Maharajas and photographs by John Swope. The film will be shown at the Academy Cinema in January.

Sight and Sound commenting on the film said: 'The fact that *Autobiography of a Princess* is the richest and most dense Merchant/Ivory production for some years testifies to the importance of writer Ruth Prawer Jhabvala to their set-up. Her script not only makes some of the most probing comments on the Anglo-Indian scene by a foreign writer since Forster, but works them into a closely knit tapestry of words and images which constantly counterpoint and contradict each other'.

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JOHN MURRAY

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In the frenzied days of the war, *Film and Reality* appeared to us to be an anthology undertaken in the language of seagulls, a tongue most exquisitely pursued in 'McSorley's Wonderful Saloon'. We assumed, perhaps mistakenly, that we had an obligation, if not a mission, to translate it via the stock shot library back into the more relevant language of propaganda and education.

There were, in the National Film Board, few temptations, or even opportunities to depart from our native Ealing or Brazil to fresh woods and pastures new. Grierson stood by those whom he termed 'settlers', not that 'settlers' got many credit titles, or had their 'wages of misery' raised.

Withal, he loved the gifted Cavalcanti lavishly, and would

have been enormously grateful for Sir Michael Balcon's graceful and perceptive appreciation, and the fair-minded good judgment of Paul Rotha, John Taylor and Basil Wright.

Can we now hope for a respite from Sound and Fury, and return to Sight and Sound and sensibility?

Yours faithfully,
MARGARET ANN ELTON
Clevedon, Somerset.

Night Moves

SIR,—As Richard Combs in his review (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1975) rightly suggests, Alan Sharp's script for *Night Moves* is rooted in the Forties private eye/film noir tradition and contains 'a network of references to . . . events

and personages in American history.' But perhaps these allusions need to be spelt out more than they have been in SIGHT AND SOUND or elsewhere. The Watergate references are of course framed by the dramatic sweep of the film from Southern California to the Florida Keys—from San Clemente to Key Biscayne, encompassing the world of those who made up the Nixon court and were described in a memorable phrase by Kirkpatrick Sale as 'the Southern Rim Americans'.

Another set of references is to Bogart movies, or more specifically the thrillers made with John Huston. The initial and most explicit one is to the first Huston-Bogart collaboration, which is evoked when the film's private eye Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman), after discovering his wife with her lover, is taunted with the line, 'That's it, just take a poke at me, the way Sam Spade would.' Then the film ends with a direct visual parallel to *Key Largo* (1948), but whereas in the Bogart-Huston picture the hero confidently steers his boat back to Florida after despatching his fellow passengers, in the Hackman-Penn film the more seriously wounded hero remains stranded at sea, going around in circles.

Between these two is a third allusion that is even more crucial, though it has attracted surprisingly little attention. It comes when Paula (Jennifer Warren) is seducing Moseby to distract him from her lover's criminal activities. She involves Harry in a poignantly nostalgic conversation in which a variety of historical names are dropped. Recalling her first sexual experience, she identifies one 'Billy Dannreuther' as the first

boy to touch her breast and arouse her. Who is Billy Dannreuther, and what right has he to take his place beside Ben Franklin, Sacco and Vanzetti and Jack Kennedy, whose names also crop up in this conversation? Well, Billy Dannreuther is the middle-aged adventurer played by Bogart in *Beat the Devil* (1954), the last picture he made with Huston. *Beat the Devil* is some kind of a cultural landmark—the time that a jaded star and an equally disillusioned director set out deliberately to mock a set of values and a character that they had first come together to celebrate. It was also the beginning of the self-consciously camp movie, and with *Beat the Devil*—notwithstanding the seven disparate films he made before his death three years later—Bogart effectively ended his career.

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP FRENCH
London, N.W.5.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RENEE EPSTEIN is a freelance journalist from California . . . VERINA GLAESSNER is former editor of the film page in *Time Out*, and has written a book on the Hong Kong cinema . . . MARK SHIVAS is a former editor of *Movie* magazine, and introduced Granada's 'Cinema' programme. His productions for the BBC include *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Casanova* and *The Edwardians* . . . GARRETT STEWART is a member of the Department of English at Boston University, and has written for literary and academic journals as well as on movies for *Film Quarterly*. His book *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination* was published last year by Harvard University Press.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EMI for *Aces High*.
FOX-RANK for *Farewell, My Lovely*, *Innocents with Dirty Hands*.
UNITED ARTISTS for *The Killer Elite*, *Last Tango in Paris*.
CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *Hester Street*.
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*.
FILMS DU LOSANGE/JANUS FILM for *La Marquise d'O*.
PEA/DEBORAH BEER for *Salò*, or *The 120 Days of Sodom*, photograph of Pasolini.
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FILM GUIDE

*ATTILA '74 (Academy)

Relatively restrained documentary view, from the Greek perspective, of Cyprus before and after the Turkish invasion. Mainly composed of interviews with Greek Cypriots, including the wily Makarios, and reflective rather than analytical. (Director, Michael Cacoyannis.)

*AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PRINCESS (Contemporary)

Merchant-Ivory's probing study of India and the Raj seen through the memories of an exiled Indian Princess and her father's ageing tutor. Essentially a brilliantly scripted dialogue piece, it also juggles intriguingly with film within film. (James Mason, Madhur Jaffrey; director, James Ivory.)

*BUG (CIC)

Heading the post-*Jaws* wave of man versus nature movies, *Bug* is rather an old-fashioned creepy-crawly horror. Perfectly photogenic bugs, and a perfectly nutty professor (Bradford Dillman); but with little to say about either, the film falls back on a steady diet of special effects. (Joanna Miles, Richard Gilliland; director, Jeannot Szwarc.)

CANNIBALS, THE (Cinegate)
Sophocles' *Antigone* relocated in a modern society beset by fascist tyranny and littered with the corpses of revolutionaries. Liliana Cavani drains away argument and debate in favour of chic liberal rhetoric and a sterile, fashion-plate style. (Britt Ekland, Pierre Clémenti, Tomas Milian.)

*CONFRONTATION (Contemporary)

Reconstruction of pre-war political assassination of a leading Nazi in Davos, put together soundly, methodically and with a sense of the past. Ends with a present-day interview with the assassin, now a solid Israeli citizen. (Peter Bollag, Gert Haucke; director, Rolf Lyssy.)

*DOG DAY AFTERNOON (Columbia-Warner)

The kind of epic collage that Sidney Lumet seems to do better than anyone (Robert Altman included); a crazy jigsaw rendering of the famous day of the gay bank robber. Brisk, humorous, and alive with urban energies and angers fretting through the 92-degree heat. (Al Pacino, John Cazale, Sully Boyar.) *Reviewed.*

*ENIGMA OF KASPAR

HAUSER, THE (Contemporary)
Werner Herzog's film about the mysterious Kaspar, found wandering in Nuremberg in 1828, given shelter, educated, and eventually murdered. The other side of the coin from Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*, stressing not the educational process but Kaspar's disturbing otherness. Intent, truthful and a film of rare concentration. (Bruno S., Walter Ladengast, Brigitte Mira.)

*FAREWELL, MY LOVELY (Fox-Rank)

The old Marlowe (trenchcoated Mitchum) and the new (he's a weary soul) don't quite jell in this evocative remake. But atmosphere and performances are terrific. (John Ireland, Sylvia Miles, Charlotte Rampling; director, Dick Richards.) *Reviewed.*

*FOX (Cinegate)

Class exploitation in a homosexual milieu is the theme of Fassbinder's 19th feature, with the director playing the doomed working-class hero who wins a lottery and falls in love. A bit pat in some of its liberal equations, but with fine performances, suitably monstrous décor and a sharp sense of the relations between culture and economics. (Peter Chatel, Karl-Heinz Böhm.)

*GOALKEEPER'S FEAR OF THE PENALTY, THE (Cinegate)

Wim Wenders' haunting account of the professional footballer as existential drop-out. Losing his grip on his game, and nagged by a sense of his peripheral role (in life as in sport), Josef Bloch wanders down some hallucinatory dead ends, clinging to an incongruous life-raft of American movies and pop-songs. (Arthur Brauss, Kai Fischer, Erika Pluhar.)

*GOOD MORNING (Cinegate)

A sunny suburban Ozu comedy (1959), about social interchange between family members, schoolmates, neighbours and prospective lovers—centred on a vow of silence taken by two boys irritated by all the aimless chatter. Lovely pastel colours, bouncy Tati-like score and a gentle humour which pins a whole society precisely into place. (Chishu Ryu, Masahiko Shimazu.)

*HESTER STREET (Connoisseur)

Impressive debut by writer-director Joan Micklin Silver depicting Jewish immigrants in New York near the turn of the century. Sensitive and unhackneyed in its period detail, performances and black and white photography, with a sharp comic eye for the gains and losses of becoming American. (Steven Keats, Carol Kane.) *Reviewed.*

*INNOCENTS WITH DIRTY HANDS (Fox-Rank)

Chabrol's latest, telling a corkscrew-twisting plot about wife, husband and lover and their variously murderous inclinations. The vehicle's machinery is a bit blatant, but with Chabrol at the wheel the ride is both smooth and disturbing. (Rod Steiger, Romy Schneider, Jean Rochefort.) *Reviewed.*

INTIMATE REFLECTIONS (Focus)

Pretentious first feature about a young couple just discovering their boredom, intercut with monologues from an older man and woman who may or may not be the couple's imagined future selves. Slick consumer-society satire, songs by Paul Jones and lots of redundant slow motion. (Anton Rodgers, Lillias Walker, Sally Anne Newton; director, Don Boyd.)

*JAWS (CIC)

Peter Benchley's attempt to re-do *Moby Dick* for the best-seller market has been streamlined into the smoothest piece of movie hokum in years. The shark hunters are basically three clichés in a boat, and the action is never honed to the metaphorical point of director Steven Spielberg's *Duel*, but the chase is novel and at times quite exciting. (Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss, Murray Hamilton.) *Reviewed.*

LAW AND DISORDER (EMI)

The ironic detachment of Czech comedy disappears without trace in this Ivan Passer oddity which crosses *Death Wish* with TV sitcom (two disgruntled New Yorkers join the Auxiliary Police to get their own back). Jokes and playing are equally raucous, though the bull-headed duo of Carroll O'Connor and Ernest Borgnine has its moments.

*LEGEND OF MACHINE GUN KELLY, THE (Focus)

TV rip-off from *Dillinger*, scripted by Milius himself and applying similar myth-making tactics to the earlier career of G-Man Melvin Purvis. A pale pastiche, with Dale Robertson a stolid substitute for Ben Johnson. (Harris Yulin, Matt Clark; director, Dan Curtis.)

*LENNY (United Artists)

Star Dustin Hoffman and director Bob Fosse produce a remarkable impersonation of the scabrous, scatological Lenny Bruce—catching every tic and inflection in sculpted black and white—but totally fail to encompass the anarchy of his humour. (Valerie Perrine, Jan Miner, Stanley Beck.)

*LIFE SIZE (Fox-Rank)

Authentic study in fetishism, with Michel Piccoli falling for the charms of a life-size rubber doll—a situation which allows for many bizarre bits of business, though it proves insufficient to sustain the whole movie. Piccoli, needless to say, throws himself into it all with grave abandon. (Valentine Tessier; director, Luis Berlanga.)

LISZTOMANIA (Columbia-Warner)

Or how 19th-century pop star and womaniser Franz Liszt had his tunes stolen by blood-sucking fascist Frankenstein Richard Wagner. Ken Russell's frantic, gaudy compendium of camp, secondhand Freud and third-rate pastiche is like a bad song without end. (Roger Daltrey, Sara Kestelman, Paul Nicholas.)

*LOVE AND DEATH (United Artists)

After the futuristic hi-jinks of *Sleeper*, the screen's most cerebral joker dips into the annals of Russian literature and comes up with his usual grab-bag of literary and cinematic parodies. Less successfully held together than before, but there's still fifty terrific jokes for every dud one. (Woody Allen, Diane Keaton; director, Woody Allen.)

LOVES OF LISZT, THE (Gala)

Excessively respectful, excessively long, excessively dull hagiography. All too effective as a counterblast to *Lisztomania*, this Russian-Hungarian co-production enshrines its subject as a national treasure while reducing his *amours* to cosmetic inspiration in the old Hollywood style. (Imre Sinkovits, Ariadne Shengelaya, Klara Lutchko; director, Márton Keleti.)

MAKING IT (Connoisseur)

Joyless, formless and rather glib saga of two small-time macho hoods who delight in outraging bourgeois sensibilities with car thefts, petty cruelties and sexual pranks. Gérard Depardieu and Jeanne Moreau (in a cameo role) give this sub-Corman material somewhat more class than it deserves. (Patrick Dewaere, Miou-Miou; director, Bertrand Blier.)

MANDINGO (CIC)

Deep South melodrama, impeccably made, glowingly photographed and wallowing uncomprehendingly in racist brutality. James Mason's uncertain Southern accent and the relentless piling up of atrocities help to make it palatably ludicrous. (Perry King, Susan George, Richard Ward; director, Richard Fleischer.)

MAN FRIDAY (Fox-Rank)

Peter O'Toole as a cantankerous Crusoe in Jack Gold's new version, which rather flatly fumbles the promising idea of letting us see life on the island from Friday's point of view. (Richard Roundtree.)

MR. QUILP (EMI)

Joyless monster of a musical, in which lots of talented people are given nothing to do—apart from Anthony Newley (playing the dwarfish villain of 'The Old Curiosity Shop') who does far too much. Poor songs and lackadaisical direction compound the felony. (David Hemmings, David Warner, Michael Hordern, Jill Bennett; director, Michael Tuchner.)

RACE WITH THE DEVIL (Fox-Rank)

The Texas Roadshow Massacre as four holiday-makers in their mobile home are hunted by members of an all-pervasive witch cult. Very thick-car. (Peter Fonda, Warren Oates, Loretta Swit; director, Jack Starrett.)

ROLLERBALL (United Artists)

Blockbuster about mindless sports hero defying an ineffable system in a future society where war, poverty, disease, motivation and verisimilitude have all magically vanished. Gratuitous widescreen stereophonic violence amply fills in the gaps. (James Caan, John Houseman; director, Norman Jewison.)

*ROMANTIC ENGLISH-WOMAN, THE (Fox-Rank)

Neither Joseph Losey, nor his collaborator Tom Stoppard, seem to have found much to exercise themselves in this comedy of bourgeois manners beyond a peevish disdain for both characters and putative women's lib theme. The result is an oddly soured 'woman's' picture. (Glenda Jackson, Michael Caine, Helmut Berger, Michel Lonsdale.)

*RUSSIAN ROULETTE (Fox-Rank)

Watchable if unexceptional thriller, directed by former Altman editor Lou Lombardo, about a plot to assassinate Kosygin during a visit to Vancouver. Too conventional to be Altmanesque despite jokey inflections. (George Segal, Denholm Elliott, Christina Raines.)

SHARKS' TREASURE (United Artists)

Typical Cornel Wilde adventure, with seekers after sunken treasure coping with sharks, escaped convicts and a stream of homilies from the old man of the sea played by Wilde himself. Saved by the performances and a hint of self-mockery. (Cliff Osmond, David Canary, Yaphet Kotto.)

STREETFIGHTER, THE (Columbia-Warner)

A tale of people living by their wits (or their fists) during the Depression. With its sparse dialogue and functional relationships, it clearly aspires to say something about the necessities of life in such hard times, but remote direction and an impervious Charles Bronson muffle the message. (James Coburn, Strother Martin, Jill Ireland; director, Walter Hill.)

THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR (CIC)

Espionage drama about the parasite politics of the CIA, which sets spies to catch its own spies. But rather than demonstrate how it's done, Sydney Pollack concentrates on the romantic mooning of Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway and drowns the political theme in the mythic grandeur of *Jeremiah Johnson*. (John Houseman, Cliff Robertson, Max von Sydow.)

WHITE LINE FEVER (Columbia-Warner)

Little parable about the individual up against the System, which keeps on the move to avoid close scrutiny of either its ramshackle plot or its identikit characters. (Jan-Michael Vincent, Kay Lenz, Slim Pickens, L. Q. Jones; director, Jonathan Kaplan.)

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